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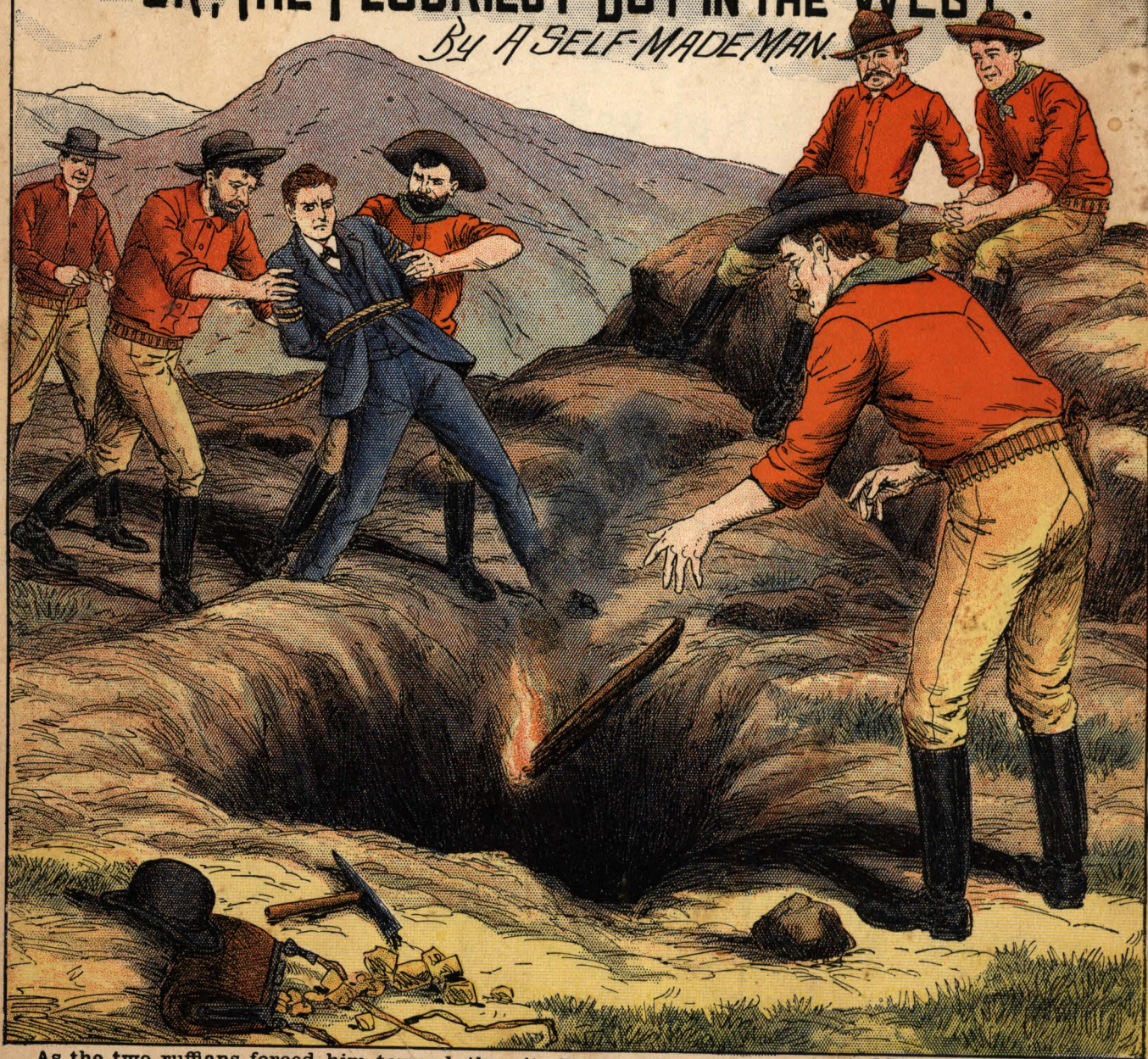
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FORTUNE AND WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

AFTER A FORTUNE; OR, THE PLUCKIEST BOY IN THE WEST.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



As the two ruffians forced him toward the pit, Paul recoiled from the horrible fate designed for him. "Dead boys tell no tales!" exclaimed Gonzalez, with an exultant laugh, as he cast the torch into the dark hole.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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AFTER A FORTUNE

OR,

The Pluckiest Boy in the West

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

JOB ROBINSON.

He was an old man and very feeble, and his name was Job Robinson.

His features were tanned and weatherbeaten, like a sailor's, and his hands were horny and seamed, as if hard work and plenty of it had been their portion all through life.

He carried a heavy Malacca cane to support his drooping figure, and was often seen leaning upon it with both hands crossed, gazing out toward the setting sun, as if his thoughts lay in that direction.

Looking neither to the right nor left, nor accosting a soul, the old man moved about the immediate neighborhood of the shabby little house in which he lived all alone near the blacksmith's shop.

Once a week he visited the general store and purchased the few necessities he needed, generally pointing out what he wanted, and uttering as few words as possible, though his bright eyes often rested with a look of some interest on the manly lad who usually waited on him, Paul Clifford by name, whose widowed mother carried on the store and postoffice.

His advent in Harley's Corners, which consisted of a few houses, a general store and a blacksmith's shop, created a good deal of speculation; but curiosity remained

unsatisfied, for the stranger was as uncommunicative as a clam, and nobody even knew his name until Paul Clifford found a letter in the mail one morning addressed to Job Robinson, Harley's Corners, Minn., and, knowing nobody by that name in the place, he carried it out to the stranger's habitation.

The old man claimed the letter, thanked the boy for bringing it out to him, and from that moment a kind of friendship sprang up between these two.

The old fellow came oftener to the store after that, and seemed contented to sit out on the veranda in the sunshine and smoke a curiously-shaped pipe that afforded him much comfort.

Paul when he was not busy would go outside and talk to him, and they frequently carried on quite a lengthy conversation together when no one else was by; but the moment a third party approached and chipped in Robinson became as mute as a mop-stick, and as oblivious of the presence of the newcomer as though he did not exist.

The gossips of the neighborhood, as a matter of course, tackled Paul for information.

They reasoned that being so often in the old man's company the boy must know a good deal about him; but he assured them that he was no wiser than were they themselves.

"What does he talk about?" they wanted to know.

"Oh, nothing in particular," replied Paul, carelessly.

"Well, why don't you draw him out? Ask him where

"...came from, why he came here to live, and why he doesn't act more sociable?"

But Paul refused to pry into the affairs of Job Robinson, because he had an instinctive feeling that if he did, his new friend would terminate their acquaintance, and he had come to like the old man in spite of his peculiarities, though he could not exactly tell why he was attracted to him.

Paul Clifford was a bright and ambitious boy.

His father, who had followed the carpentering trade, died when he was seven years of age, and he was now sixteen.

A year after her husband's death Mrs. Clifford came to Harley's Corners and opened the general store which, in connection with the product of a small plot of ground, supported her and her son.

Paul was first favorite in the neighborhood, especially among the girls, who were continually casting sheep's eyes at him.

His particular friend was Andy Blake, a sturdy, good-hearted lad, who worked for a miserly old farmer in the vicinity.

Andy had all sorts of grievances against his employer, the principal one of which was the foolish contract he had made with the man to work six months at \$10 a month, the money to be only paid in a lump sum at the end of that time, and to be forfeited if Andy left before the expiration of his term of servitude.

It was now drawing close to the end of the six months, and the farmer was exercising all his ingenuity to try and make things so hot for Andy that he would run away, in which event he would save the \$60.

One dark, blustering spring night Paul closed up the store at a little before the usual hour, and told his mother that he was going down the road to call on Job Robinson.

"I haven't seen him in a couple of days, mother. I'm afraid he's sick."

"Very well, Paul. Don't stay away too long."

"No, mother, I won't."

After splitting some kindling wood for the stove in the morning Paul put on his hat and thick pea jacket and left the house.

It was a lonesome and gloomy walk to the cross-road where the blacksmith shop stood, nearly half a mile from the store.

The night wind soughed through the trees along his path, shaking the branches violently at times.

Some boys would not have cared to have undertaken that walk alone.

Their excited fancy would have conjured a ghost out of many of the natural objects which stood along the road, half-concealed in the shrubbery.

It took more than a shadow to frighten Paul, who was a nervy lad.

So, with his hands stuck in his jacket pockets, he trudged along, whistling cheerily, and wondering how long it would be before he would have the chance to get

out into the big bustling world and carve a future for himself.

"Mother and I are only just vegetating here in Harley's Corners. We are making a bare living. I wish she'd give up the store and move to some good-sized city where I could find a job that would give me a foothold in life. I'm only going to seed in this place. Hello, what's that?"

Something that sounded like a dismal groan had struck upon the boy's ears, and he stopped short and listened.

The sound was presently repeated.

It came from the side of the road, apparently from under the scarred oak, whose blasted trunk shone white and spectral through the gloom.

"Could that have been the wind?" he muttered. "It sounded rather human to me. I'll——"

For the third time the sepulchral sound was borne to his ears.

At that moment he noticed a moving object coming toward him up the road.

"I wonder who that is abroad at this time of night?" Paul asked himself, watching the approaching figure. "He couldn't have made that noise, for it sounded close by, and the wind is not blowing from that direction."

He stood and waited for the newcomer to reach him.

He was not kept long in suspense as to the person's identity, for he recognized his friend, Andy Blake, by the peculiar battered white hat the boy was accustomed to wear.

"What the dickens brings him out to-night? He seems to be heading for the store. I wonder if old Tartar has sent him after something?"

Andy didn't notice Paul standing in the road until our hero hailed him.

"Oh, Lor'!" exclaimed the farm boy, coming to a dead stop. "Who's there?"

He looked as if he was on the point of taking to his heels by the way he had come.

"Don't you know me, Andy? I'm Paul," said Clifford, cheerfully.

"Is that really you, Paul?" asked Andy, doubtfully.

"Sure it's me."

"What are you doing out here?" asked Blake, coming cautiously forward.

"What are you doing out here yourself, Andy?"

"I was coming to see you, Paul."

"Rather a late hour for you to get away from the farm, isn't it?"

"I've shook the farm," replied Blake, in a tone as gloomy as the night.

"You've what?" ejaculated Paul, hardly believing the evidence of his ears.

"I've run away from the measly old place," answered Andy.

"You don't mean it."

"I do mean it."

"How came you to do that?"

"I couldn't stand it no longer. I'm only flesh and

blood. I believe a wooden image would rebel at the tyranny of Simon Tartar."

"So he's done you up at last, has he?" said Paul. "Well, it's a shame. It's an old trick of his. I was hoping you'd be able to hold out long enough to get your money. You've worked for him five months so far, haven't you?"

"Five months and three days. Do you think I could get a lawyer to make him stump up the \$60 he owes me?"

"You might; but it would cost you half of it for his services, and maybe something more for court fees, though I suppose he'd have to pay that if the case went against him."

"I wouldn't care what it cost if I only could get back at him. He's the worst old screw I ever met in my life, and his wife ain't much better. Why, I haven't had a square meal since I went to work for him. Mrs. Tartar weighs out the sugar, and measures the butter at every meal."

"Did they skimp themselves as well as you?"

"Sure they did; but they've used to doing that, I ain't."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I dunno," replied Andy, dejectedly. "I was coming around to see you and talk it over. I thought maybe you'd let me sleep in your barn to-night——"

"Nonsense! You shall share my bed, Andy."

"I don't want to inconvenience—oh, Lor', what's that?"

It was a repetition of the dismal groan, and it sounded so close that Andy started as though some venomous insect had stung him.

"I don't know what it is," replied Paul; "but I'm going to see."

"I wouldn't if I was you," said Andy, with a fearful glance at the lightning-blasted oak.

Paul, however, had already started for the oak, and Andy followed him at a safe distance.

Again that disquieting groan sounded upon the air.

There was no doubt now that it came from the foot of the scarred oak.

Paul marched straight up to it, and soon made out the figure of a man crouched among the gnarled roots of the dead tree.

It wasn't necessary for the boy to see his face, which was buried in his arms, to recognize him—the stout Malacca cane lying across his knees showed who it was.

"Job Robinson!" exclaimed Paul, staring down in astonishment.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUNTED MAN.

Yes, it was Job Robinson, and he looked to be in a pretty bad way.

"What's the matter, Mr. Robinson?" asked Paul with some concern. "Are you ill?"

A hollow groan was the only response.

"Look here, Andy. We'll have to get him up to store. He seems to be a sick man."

"Who is he?" asked Blake.

"You've heard me speak of Job Robinson, the old man who lives up near the blacksmith shop?"

"Yes. I heard you say something about him."

"Well, this is the man. Something has happened to him. I was on my way to see him to-night, that's how you happened to meet me here on the road. He's been calling at the store pretty regularly for the last month until this week. Not seeing him for three days, I started to call on him to-night to see if there was anything wrong with him. I can't imagine what brought him out here, unless he started for the store and was taken bad on the way. Get hold of his other arm and we'll raise him up."

Robinson made a feeble resistance and then collapsed.

It was easy to see that he could not walk in his present condition.

"We must carry him, Andy. Take charge of his legs, I'll hold up his body."

Paul picked up the Malacca cane and placing it across the old man's body, the two boys started to carry their burden to the store.

It was no easy job, for Job Robinson, in spite of his age and general weakness, was tolerably heavy.

He groaned repeatedly during the journey, which took time, as the boys had to pause at intervals to rest.

They reached the store at last, and Mrs. Clifford was greatly surprised to see not only Andy but the burden the lads carried into the house and laid upon the sitting-room lounge.

She was a sympathetic little woman, and at once busied herself to see what she could do for the poor old man.

"I'd better go for the doctor, hadn't I, mother?" asked Paul.

"I think you had."

So Paul started for Dr. Handy, who lived a quarter of a mile away.

The physician was at home and accompanied the boy back to the store.

He examined the patient, and his verdict was that Robinson had been assaulted by some one and badly beaten.

"Do you think he is seriously injured?" asked Paul anxiously.

"I am afraid he is," replied Dr. Handy, solemnly.

"Is there any danger that he may die?"

"I don't think he will live through the night."

That was quite a shock to Paul.

"What shall we do?"

"There is nothing that you can do, unless you remove him to a bed where he would be more comfortable than on this lounge. I will give him something to revive him, and we may be able to find out who was his assailant."

"We have a small spare room upstairs," said Paul. "We might carry him up there first."

"I think you had better," answered Dr. Handy.

Paul and Andy took hold of the injured man, and, as

ntly as possible, conveyed him upstairs to the spare room, where they placed him on the bed.

Dr. Handy then poured a preparation down Robinson's throat.

In a few moments he opened his eyes and gazed wildly around the room.

He tried to raise himself up, but with a groan sank back.

"I'm afraid I'm done for," he fluttered, dismally.

"What happened to you, Mr. Robinson?" Paul asked him.

"Is that you, Paul?" said the old man, in trembling tones.

"Yes, sir."

"Who are these persons?"

"This is Dr. Handy, whom I called in to attend to you, and the other is Andy Blake, a friend of mine."

Robinson groaned and lay quiet for a moment or two.

Suddenly he started up in an excited way.

"Where is my cane?" he asked, wildly. "I must have it. He must never get it."

"Your cane is downstairs."

"Bring it to me," he demanded insistently.

"Go down and get it, Andy," said Paul, wondering why the old man was so anxious to get hold of it, for it was certainly of no use to him in his present state.

Andy fetched the Malacca cane up in a few moments.

Robinson seized it as if it was worth its weight in gold, and made an effort to examine it.

He seemed satisfied that the cane was all right and then laid it close beside him on the bed, but maintained a grip upon the carved head.

"I can do very little for him," Dr. Handy said to Paul. "We ought to take his ante-mortem statement, for he can't live many hours."

"That is tough," said the boy, sadly.

"Now get me some warm water, a sponge, a pair of scissors, and some linen rags. He has a bad cut on his head which I must attend to right away."

Paul got the articles called for and the doctor did the rest.

Robinson never made a move while the physician was working over him.

"Now I'll give him another drink of this preparation," said Dr. Handy. "It will revive him, and we must try and get his statement."

He poured the draught down the old man's throat.

It had an immediate effect.

Robinson opened his eyes again and looked intently at the boy.

"You seem to have been attacked by someone," said Paul.

Robinson nodded his head.

"Who was it? A tramp?"

The man shook his head and then rolled his eyes around fearfully, as though he expected to find the person who had struck him down close at hand.

"Andy and I found you stretched out at the foot of a tree along the road," said Paul. "Were you coming to the store?"

Robinson nodded.

"And someone struck you down in the road?"

Robinson shook his head.

"Where were you attacked?"

"In the house," replied the old man, with an effort.

"In your house?"

Robinson nodded again.

"Would you know the man if you saw him again?"

The old man closed his eyes and seemed to shudder.

"Could you describe him? If you can I'll send Andy for the constable and put him on the rascal's track."

Robinson made no answer to this.

He appeared to be growing weaker again.

"When I am dead," he whispered, "don't let him get this cane."

"Him? Who do you mean?" asked Paul, in some surprise.

"The—man—who—hit—me."

"Of course the rascal shan't have it," replied Paul, soothingly, thinking that Robinson was wandering in his head. "But I'd give something to know what he looks like."

The old man lay a little while without speaking; then he whispered:

"I want to—to talk—to you—alone, Paul."

Paul looked at Dr. Handy.

"You had better humor him," said the physician. "Take notice of all he says."

The doctor and Andy then went downstairs, the former taking his leave.

"Are we—alone?" asked Robinson, eagerly.

"Yes," answered Paul.

"Give me another drink of that stuff."

Paul poured out another dose and let him drink it.

His eyes grew brighter and his voice stronger.

"I'm going to die, Paul," he said, earnestly.

"I hope not," replied the boy.

"Yes, yes; I'm done up for good, but before I die I'm going to make you my heir, Paul. You're a good boy. I like you. You're the only friend I've made in years."

He paused and steadfastly regarded Paul for a moment or two.

"I never told you why I came to this place."

That was a fact, and Paul was somewhat eager to know the reason.

"I haven't had an easy hour for years," went on Robinson. "I've been a hunted man. There's been one on my track at all times whom I've tried in vain to shake off. I settled here because it was an out-of-the-way place, and I thought I might end my last few years in peace. I thought maybe he'd never track me to such a lonesome section. But I was wrong. No bloodhound has a keener scent than he. He never gave up the hunt, and to-night he found me."

Robinson shivered and glanced nervously around the room.

"You are sure we're alone?"

"Certainly," replied Paul.

"Go to the window and look out. He might even now be hovering about this house, eager for some chance to get at me and tear the secret from me. But I mean to get the best of him. Yes, yes; he must never know it. No one must hear it but you, Paul. You are my heir. You shall reap the reward of your kindness to me."

He lay back and breathed heavily, much exhausted.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET OF THE MALACCA CANE.

"What is this secret you want to tell me, Mr. Robinson?" asked Paul, after a short silence.

Job made an effort to speak.

Paul bent down and caught the word "drink."

The boy saw that the old man was too weak to go on without a stimulant, so he gave him some more of the cordial.

Job Robinson brightened up at once, and began the following story, which was frequently interrupted by his growing weakness, but which Paul managed to stave off by occasional doses of the doctor's powerful preparation:

"I was a prospector by occupation. I have had my ups and downs. Sometimes I've had money to burn; again I have been very poor. Hard luck and drink have been my ruin. Five years ago, while prospecting in the valley of the Rio Santa Cruz, in Southwestern Arizona, I discovered an old-fashioned gold and silver mine. When it had been worked I had no means of knowing, but I found galleries below the surface leading into the heart of Skull Mountain and the remains of picks and shovels of an old-fashioned and foreign-looking make, from which I judged that the mine had been originally discovered and worked by Mexicans. I made the discovery by accident, having slipped into a fairly deep hole while traveling toward Tucson in the cool of the night. I was unable to extricate myself from the hole, and as there was nearly six feet of water in it, which broke my fall, I gave myself up as lost, for the chances of rescue from such a place were so remote as to be hardly worth considering. Fortunately in lifting myself up and feeling around I found an opening in the side of the hole. I pulled my body up and crawled into the excavation, which was quite small in circumference. I had some matches in a safe, and, lighting one, I found myself in a kind of tunnel. I followed this inward for perhaps a hundred feet, when I came out into what appeared to be the gallery of a mine. Turning at haphazard to the right, I walked for a matter of two hundred feet, when I came to a cross-section much wider and higher. Following this, I reached a pile of live brush

through which I forced my way, and finally came out in the night. I was deeply thankful for my provident escape from what I had looked upon as a living tomb, and I sat down to rest myself. The strange passages through which I had made my way aroused my curiosity, and I determined to examine them thoroughly before leaving the locality. I made several torches of dried brushwood and penetrated the place once more. I carefully threaded my way back the way I had come, and then followed the first gallery right into the heart of the mountain. At the extreme end I found quartz-bearing rock, rich with gold and silver, and, having spent some time in the examination of the place, I realized that I had made a wonderful find. I took the bearings of the mine as well as I could in the dark and started for Tucson. Reaching that town, I made preparations to return to the mine and stake it out properly so as to establish my right to ownership. I was so tickled with my great luck that I got drunk, and in some manner I must have let slip information of my find, for when I set out for Skull Mountain I was followed by a Greaser named Manuel Gonzalez and two companions. I paid no attention to this until I reached the neighborhood of the mine, when I branched off from the trail the three of us had been following. They followed me. This struck me after awhile as exceedingly suspicious, especially as I tried to shake them and could not. At length they came up and Gonzalez demanded an interview. He told me that he knew the mission I was bound on, and that I must take him and his associates into my confidence. Upon my refusal he threatened me with instant death. I saw I was in the rascal's power and was obliged to yield. It was the hardest kind of luck, but I could not escape the consequences of my own folly. I conducted them to Skull Mountain, where, as it was late, we encamped for the night. It was arranged that I should point out the opening to the mine in the morning, and that we all should examine it together. I had little doubt that after the secret ceased to be my exclusive property that Gonzalez and his friends would kill me in order to retain the knowledge of this mine among themselves, to be eventually disposed of for a large sum. Such black-hearted treachery was second nature with desperadoes of their stamp. I saw that my only hope lay in effecting my escape during the hours of darkness. Gonzalez, however, kept a wary eye upon my movements, as if he suspected my intention. When I strayed away from the campfire he followed me, remarking sarcastically that he was afraid I might lose myself in those trackless wilds, and they could not afford to have such a fate befall me. At length it occurred to me that if I could reach the neighborhood of the hole by which I was accidentally introduced to the mine, and could slip into it, I might make my escape. It was my only hope, and I started to find it on pretence of taking an observation. I am satisfied Gonzalez believed I was lying, but he did not interfere to prevent me. He was satisfied to accompany me in order to let me know how foolish it was for me to fancy that I could elude him. I found the

le and passed it without making any sign; but, coming to a big rock, I suddenly struck the Mexican to the ground and ran for my life. He was after me, with many oaths of vengeance, but I threw myself on the ground and slipped into the hole, landing, as before, up to my armpits in the water. He heard the splash and saw the hole in time to avoid going into it himself against his will. He supposed I had fallen in accidentally and called to his men. While they were coming up with torches I crawled into the opening and lay there. When they flashed their torches down they saw the water, but no signs of me. They waited around awhile for me to appear, and as I did not, I made out from their conversation that they believed I was drowned. They were very mad over the matter, for, though they searched the locality pretty well next day, they could not find the entrance to the mine. At night they abandoned their search and set out for Tucson. As soon as they were well on their way I followed them, as I could not remain, since they had carried off all my supplies and implements. I lay low in Tucson for more than a week, and then renewed my preparations with great caution. For fear that I might forget my bearings I made a note of them and concealed the paper about me. The night before the morning I had selected to steal out of town I was discovered by the rascal Gonzalez, who was mightily astonished at my resurrection. I saw that I must abandon my plans for awhile, and to that end I left Tucson for Santa Fe. The scoundrel followed me, and maintained so close a watch upon my movements that I was unable to shake him off. I then went to Denver, and found him still at my heels. I spent two years in various parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Nebraska, but was always sure to find him sooner or later on my trail. Finally he ran me down in Cheyenne, and nearly killed me in a desperate attempt to wring my secret from me. I was laid up in the hospital for six months, and when I was discharged I gave him the slip and came to this place, a wreck of my former self. I gave up all thoughts of reaping any advantage from my great discovery. I hoped to end my days in peace, and if I found some one I thought worthy I meant to leave him the secret of the Arizona mine. A year ago I purchased a heavy cane made of Malacca wood, and had the handle remodeled with a secret recess in it. I placed inside of this the directions and landmarks that would enable my successor to find the hidden opening to the mine. This cane I leave to you, Paul. Take it. Unscrew the handle—not now, but after I am dead—and the secret of the mine at Skull Mountain will be yours. There is gold and silver quartz enough there to make you a wealthy man—probably a millionaire many times over if you can take full advantage of the property, which you must acquire according to law. Above all things, watch out for this Mexican. He is a persevering rascal. He never let up on me, though how he trailed me to this place is beyond me. That he did is a sign of his determined will. He came upon me to-night unawares, and demanded a half interest in the mine, threatening me

with death if I refused. I did refuse. He then beat me nearly to death. To save my life I resorted to a ruse. I pretended I had buried the written directions of the mine's location and offered to tell him where if he would let up on me and go. He agreed, and I pointed to the stone in front of the fireplace. He left me alone and started to dig it up. While he was engaged thus I seized my cane and slipped out of the house, intending to come to the store here for protection. But I could get no further than the old scarred oak where you found me. He has got his revenge at any rate, for I can live but a little while longer; but the secret is yours, not his, and it is up to you to see that he is foiled for good and all. He will hardly suspect you unless——"

A noise at the window at that moment attracted the dying man's attention, which was acutely on the alert.

He sprang up with a gurgling cry and pointed feverishly at the panes.

Paul, greatly startled, turned around and looked in the direction of the window.

He was just in time to see a face, swarthy in color and diabolical in expression, press against the glass.

Then it vanished like the fading of a dream, and when Paul rushed to the window to look out there was nothing in sight.

Evidently it was the face of Manuel Gonzalez.

The Mexican had climbed upon the roof of the kitchen extension, and was thus able to look in at the window of the spare room.

"He's gone," said Paul to himself, after a last vain look into the gloomy night.

He turned away and returned to the bed.

Here a shock awaited him.

Job Robinson's earthly tribulations were over—he was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

PAUL AND ANDY TALK IT OVER.

Paul and Andy watched that night over the body of the old man.

The former was rather silent and thoughtful, for he had much to ponder over in Robinson's story of the deserted mine under Skull Mountain in far-off Arizona.

And he was heir to all that wealth, which might amount to millions.

The next question was how was he going to prove the truth of Robinson's strange and wonderful story, and, admitting its genuineness, how take possession of his inheritance?

"I can't understand how the old man allowed himself to be frightened out of his rights by that rascal of a Mexican. Why didn't he have him arrested? Or why didn't he get up a company to work the mine? Or sell his discovery to one or more capitalists? If it wasn't for that

villainous face I saw at the window—the face of Manuel Gonzalez, I suppose—I should almost feel inclined to put the whole yarn down as a figment of the old man's distorted brain."

Paul's eyes fell on the Malacca cane.

He picked it up and examined the head carefully.

It was carved in the shape of a dog's head and was almost a work of art.

He tried to unscrew it.

It took a good bit of muscle to start it, but it finally yielded, and Paul began to unscrew it with eager anticipation of what he expected to find.

"Hello," chipped in Andy, who was feeling somewhat sleepy, "what are you doing to the old man's cane?"

"Robinson made me a present of it before he died."

"What are you taking the head off for?"

"To see what's inside."

Andy wanted to see, too, so he moved his chair closer.

When the head was removed a hollow space presented itself in which Paul found a \$100 bill, a \$50, a \$20, two \$10 and a \$5 bill; also a piece of well-thumbed paper.

"Gee! You've made quite a haul," said Andy, regarding the money with great interest. "How much have you got?"

"One hundred and ninety-five dollars," replied Paul, after he had counted it up.

"What's that piece of paper?" asked Andy.

"I can't answer that question until I have looked at it."

Paul unfolded it and found a rude drawing of what purported to be the foot of Skull Mountain.

A cross marked the entrance to the mine, and various landmarks and figures indicating distances were grouped about it.

"What do you suppose that is?" asked Andy, who was looking over Paul's shoulder.

"That," replied Paul, "is supposed to be a very important document."

"Is that so? What does it refer to?"

Paul regarded his friend a moment or two without answering.

"Will you keep your mouth shut on the subject if I tell you?" he asked.

"Sure I will," replied Andy, in some surprise.

"Once upon a time Job Robinson, who was a prospector by profession, discovered a valuable mine containing veins of gold and silver-bearing quartz."

"You don't say."

"He found the mine quite by accident."

"I'd like to meet with such an accident," grinned Andy.

"But the discovery never did him any good."

"Why not?" asked Andy, in a tone of astonishment.

"Because he went on a drunk and talked too freely to a rascally Mexican named Manuel Ganzalez."

"And the Mexican got the mine away from him, eh?"

"No, he didn't. He tried to, but failed."

"Then why didn't the mine do Robinson any good?"

"Because the Mexican shadowed the old man so closely

that he dared not return to the place where the mine is to claim it."

"What did he do?"

"He traveled about from place to place trying to shake the Greaser off, but he couldn't. The Mexican nearly killed him in Cheyenne, and he was laid up for some six months in the hospital there. Finally Robinson came to Minnesota and wandered down here to Harley's Corners, where he thought the Mexican would never be able to find him."

"And did he?" asked Andy, now very much interested in the story.

"He did. He found him to-night, and beat him so severely that he is the cause of the old man's death."

"Did he get what he was after?"

"He did not. What he has spent five years of persistent effort to get hold of is written down on this paper."

"Gee! Is that so?" ejaculated Andy, looking at the marks and figures with added interest. "Does this paper show where the mine is?"

"It shows how to find the entrance to the mine after you get upon the ground."

"But if you don't know what part of the country the mine is situated what good is this paper?"

"It would be no good to me in that case. Robinson, however, told me just where the mine lies."

"He did?"

Paul nodded.

"Then all you have to do is to go there and with this paper you'll be able to find it?"

"That's right, if everything is as the old man stated to me."

"A gold and silver mine is worth trying for, don't you think?"

"I do."

"I suppose it's out West, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Do you think of going out there?"

"Not just at present. How could I? I must look after mother."

"If you don't go soon somebody else might find the mine just as Robinson did, and then you'd be dished out of the chance of your life."

"That's right, too; but I don't see how I can help myself."

"I wish you could go in search of that mine, for I'd like to go with you," said Andy, eagerly.

"I'd like to take you, Andy. I wouldn't care to go out into the wilds of the Great Southwest alone."

"The mine is in the Southwest, is it?"

"Yes, it's in Arizona."

"That's a long way from here."

"I should say it is."

"What part of Arizona? That's a big State."

"In the southwestern part."

"It would cost something to go there."

"I guess \$50 in railroad fares would land one in Tucson."

"How far is the mine from Tucson?"

"About one hundred miles. Here are the figures."

"In what direction?"

"To the westward."

"How would you locate it?"

"It's under Skull Mountain. Anybody down in that part of the country should be able to tell an inquirer where Skull Mountain is. It must be a well-known landmark. I should expect to have no trouble finding it."

"How are you going to tell on which side of the mountain the mine lies?"

"The points of the compass are marked here in the corner. The mine is on the northeast side of the mountain. The Mexican has a general idea of the position of the mine; but without an exact description he is all at sea. He has found it impossible to discover the entrance to the abandoned galleries. This paper is supposed to solve that difficulty."

"You want to be careful that you don't lose that paper," said Andy.

"I'll take the same care that Robinson took. I'll return it to the handle of the Malacca cane. The cane will be easy to keep track of, and as long as I don't mislay it the paper will be at my service."

"That's a good idea," admitted Andy. "I'd like to help you find that mine."

"Well, if things could only be arranged so that I could leave mother for two or three months we'd go out to Arizona right away."

"That would suit me immensely."

"We might manage it. I'd be willing to give you a quarter interest in the mine just to have you along."

"I wouldn't ask you for a quarter interest, Paul. I'd be willing to go with you for nothing. It's your mine if you find it, and I don't want to rob you of a cent. If you should be so lucky as to find the mine with that paper, and it turns out to be valuable, you can give me any old thing you choose."

"Thanks for your offer, Andy; but I shouldn't offer you less than a quarter of what I made. We're chums, old chap. I know you'd stick by me through thick and thin, and that's worth something handsome if I should be so fortunate as to strike it rich."

"Fix it any way you want. But what's the use of talking about it unless you can see your way of getting out there."

"Well, I'm going to give the matter my earnest consideration. You mustn't overlook one thing, Andy, and that is we may expect to run foul of the Mexican, if we should go out there. He will probably guess that the old man passed his secret over to me. I can tell you one thing, however; he'll find that he can't scare me off like he did Job Robinson. The old man must have had a timid streak in him somewhere. I don't think one man in a thousand would have acted like he did. The stake was

worth fighting for. Gonzalez found he had Robinson rattled; that's why he followed him so closely, thinking that he would win out in the end."

The boys continued to talk upon the interesting subject of the gold and silver mine until morning dawned, when Andy set out for the village, a mile away, to notify the undertaker, who was also the county coroner, and the head constable.

These functionaries accompanied him in a wagon back to Harley's Corners.

CHAPTER V.

WHERE WAS MANUEL GONZALEZ?

Of course, it wasn't long before everybody in Harley's Corners knew that Job Robinson was dead, and that he died at the store.

Dr. Handy had told his wife that the old man had been the victim of an assault at the hands of some unknown person.

Mrs. Handy repeated this to a neighbor; consequently the mystery of Robinson's life was heightened by the mystery surrounding his death.

Every woman living at Harley's Corners found some excuse to visit the store in order to question Mrs. Clifford on the absorbing topic.

As Paul's mother was not one of the gossiping kind, she had very little to say about the man who had breathed his last in the spare room.

In fact, she had very little knowledge concerning the dead man, and therefore had nothing of importance to impart to curiosity-seekers.

Paul was the only one in the neighborhood with whom Robinson had been on anything like friendly terms, and he wasn't saying anything.

The coroner felt that an inquest was in order, so he impanelled a hastily-collected jury and summoned Dr. Handy, Paul, Andy and Mrs. Clifford to appear as witnesses.

The verdict rendered was, "That the deceased came to his death through injuries received at the hands of an unknown party," though the general belief was that the Mexican, Gonzalez, was responsible for Robinson's death.

The coroner instructed the constable to hunt for the Mexican, and if found to arrest him on suspicion.

Robinson received a respectable burial under the directions of Paul Clifford, his remains being deposited in the village churchyard.

After paying all the necessary expenses, the boy found he had \$100 of the old man's money left.

Paul advised Andy to see a lawyer about prosecuting Simon Tartar for the wages due him.

The lawyer said that Andy being a minor the contract would not hold water, and that consequently he was legally

entitled to his \$10 a month for services rendered to date. For a small fee he undertook to collect it for him.

Farmer Tartar endeavored to wriggle out of the matter, but the village lawyer threatened him with a suit.

Tartar then consulted a lawyer himself and was advised to settle.

He offered Andy's legal representative \$25, but it was not accepted.

In the end he had to come up with the full amount, and Andy got \$40 of it.

It took nearly a month to accomplish this happy result, during which time Andy stayed with Paul and helped work around the place.

The boys had talked about the Arizona mine nearly every day since the death of Job Robinson.

The more they thought about the unclaimed wealth to which Paul had the "open sesame" in the directions inscribed on the piece of paper concealed in the head of the Malacca cane, the more eager they grew to investigate the matter.

"You've got \$100, haven't you, Paul?" said Andy, the day he received the money his lawyer had forced from the unwilling farmer.

"Yes."

"Well, I've got \$40 now. That makes \$140 between us. That ought to take us down to Arizona and keep us while we're looking into this mine if we're willing to rough it. I'm willing to work my way in order to save the price of transportation."

"So am I, Andy; but you see I can't leave mother alone. That's the difficulty. If it wasn't for that I'd be ready to start for the Southwest to-morrow."

Andy scratched his head and admitted that their chances of going on the projected trip were rather small as things stood.

"Now, Andy, what are you going to do? You can't afford to waste your time at the store. You ought easily find employment on one of the farms hereabout. It's the beginning of May and there is lots of plowing and sowing to be done. You ought to be able to pick up \$10 or \$12 a month."

"I guess I could; but I'd much rather go mine hunting in Arizona," grinned the stout boy.

"There's small chance that you and I will get the opportunity for some time yet," replied Paul.

"I'm afraid that's a fact. I wonder if that Mexican went back there when he learned that Robinson was dead?"

"He probably did, for the constable hasn't found a clue to his presence in this neighborhood."

"I thought maybe the rascal would hang around and keep a watch on you on the chance that Robinson had told you his secret. You said that you saw his face at the window of the spare room that night the old man died."

"I did, though not very distinctly. Still I have no doubt that it was Gonzalez, for it was a swarthy, evil-

looking countenance which well fitted Robinson's description of him."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"I guess I would. It was a face not easily forgotten."

"He must have seen the old man talking to you."

"I am sure he did."

"Then I should think he would suspect that Robinson had transferred the secret to you."

"That is not impossible."

"Under such circumstances it would be natural for him to follow you up as he did the old man, more especially as you're only a boy whom he might think he could easily intimidate."

"You take a reasonable view of the matter, Andy," replied Paul, thoughtfully; "but as a whole month has gone by since Robinson died, and neither the constable nor anybody else, for that matter, has seen a suspicious-looking stranger in these parts, it looks very much as if the Mexican has decamped for parts unknown."

"It is to be hoped that he has," answered Andy. "He isn't the kind of person you or I would care to meet of a dark night."

To say the truth, Paul had been keeping a wary lookout for the Mexican ever since the death of the old man, though he said nothing about it to Andy.

The fact that Gonzalez had been looking into the room at him and Robinson that night was enough to put him on his guard.

For fear the Mexican might have acquired some knowledge of the Malacca cane as the secret repository of the information he so eagerly desired to obtain, and would make an effort to steal it, Paul had hid it in a safe place.

As the days went by and the rascal gave no signs of his existence in the neighborhood, the boy gradually came to the conclusion that Gonzalez had abandoned his efforts in that direction and had returned to Arizona.

After his conversation with Paul, Andy left the store in search of a temporary job on one of the nearby farms.

At the first place he applied for work he was engaged.

"I've got work for several months if I want to stay," he said to Paul that evening when he returned for supper.

"I thought you'd have no trouble catching on," replied his chum. "You must come in and see me as often as you can."

"Bet your life I will. If I work six months I'll have \$100 to match your little pile. Then I hope there'll be a chance for us to set off for Arizona."

Paul laughed.

He had very little expectation of seeing Arizona, or any other place outside the immediate neighborhood of Harley's Corners, that year.

But then it is the unexpected that often happens.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE PAPER OR YOUR LIFE."

One evening a few days later as Paul was preparing to close the store a boy, the son of a neighbor who lived a

short distance down the road, came in and said that his mother was sick and wanted Mrs. Clifford to go around to her house and stay a little while.

Paul took the message in to the sitting-room, where his mother was sewing, and she came out and spoke to the boy.

"Tell your mother that I'll be right over," she said, whereupon the boy left the store.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Parker's, Paul," she said, turning to her son. "I may not return before ten."

"Very well, mother," he answered. "I'll watch out for you."

Mrs. Clifford went upstairs to get her things and then departed for the home of Mrs. Parker, while Paul closed up the store, barred the door and windows as usual, and then went into the sitting-room to read until his mother came back.

There were not many books in the little wall bookcase, but there was one Paul had read and re-read many times since he was nine years of age.

That was the "Adventures of Robinson Crusoe," and the boy mechanically took it down, and opening it at random began to read.

He was soon interested again in the rescue of Friday by Crusoe, and did not hear a creaking sound in the kitchen beyond.

This noise went on for a little while in a cautious way and finally it ceased.

After a moment it was resumed and ended with a sharp snap which attracted the boy's attention.

"What's that?" he said, partly closing the book, looking up and listening.

Creak—creak—creak!

Just as if somebody was moving softly across the kitchen floor.

Paul was now certain that an intruder had effected an entrance into the house.

As we have said before, he was a plucky lad and not easily frightened.

He sprang to his feet and started for the door of the short entry between the two rooms.

As he did so the sitting-room door, which was slightly ajar, opened slowly inward, and there before his eyes stood a fierce-eyed, dark-featured man, with rings in his ears and a broad-rommed soft hat pulled well down upon his forehead whom he instinctively recognized as Manuel Gonzalez.

Paul stopped spell-bound, for the appearance of this man in his own home at this hour of the night, and when he was supposed to be many hundreds of miles away, was a surprise and a shock to him.

As the Mexican's eyes encountered the boy a crafty, sardonic expression flitted across his sunburned features.

He entered the room and closed the door behind him.

"So, young senor, we meet at last, eh?" he said, in sibilant tones.

"Who are you, and what do you want here in this house?" demanded Paul, resolutely.

"Is it necessary that I introduce myself? Have not you seen my face before? Did not Senor Robinson speak to you of me?"

"You are Manuel Gonzalez."

The Mexican grinned.

"Si, senor. You have it quite right. I am Manuel Gonzalez."

"Well, what is your business here?"

"My business!" with an evil smile. "Do you not guess it?"

"No," answered Paul, desperately.

The Mexican shot an unpleasant look at the boy.

"You think to fool me, young senor?" fiercely. "It shall be a waste of time. I am here for a purpose. Why did I follow Senor Robinson from Arizona five years ago to Santa Fe, to Denver, to—pshaw! wherever he went to escape me, who was always upon his heels, like his shadow, till I tracked him at last to this spot, where he did fancy himself safe? Is it necessary that I tell you? Did not the senor tell you everything that night he passed in his chips? I am not asleep, young senor, that I cannot guess all that passed between Senor Robinson and you that night. I was some time at the window before my presence there was discovered. My ears are sharp. Who shall say that I did not hear much of what was said?"

"You are responsible for Robinson's death," said Paul, fearlessly.

"Not so. It was his own fault that he got hurt. He was stubborn. I wanted something which he refused me. I had, shall I say, the whip hand of him. Yet he would not do as I wished. So I teach him a lesson—it was the second, and it shall be the last, as the case stands. He is dead, but that shall not matter, since he has passed to you the secret I have watched and waited five years to get. You will give it to me and we shall part as friends," with a malicious grin. "Should it happen that you, too, are stubborn—carramba!" fiercely, "I teach you a lesson you will not soon forget, I promise you."

"I don't see why you imagine that Job Robinson told me any of his business. I was going up the road the night you assaulted him in his house near the blacksmith shop, and I found him exhausted and in a bad way under a tree. I brought him here, as I would have done with any man in like condition. The doctor I sent for saw what was the matter with him and said he would not live many hours. He died before midnight. That's all there is to it."

"It is not, young senor. Before he died he gave to you the secret that cost him his life. That secret must be mine. You will tell me what I want to know or it shall cost you your life. I am not here to waste time," threateningly. "I am here for business. Do not play with me, as I am not in the humor to be put off. I have waited too long to be outwitted at the last. Come, now, speak!"

"I can tell you nothing," replied Paul, calmly.

"Nothing!" he hissed. "Think well, young senor, before I put on the screws. You are quite alone and in my power. Beware that you trifle not with me!"

Paul made no reply.

He was conscious that the rascal had him at great disadvantage.

The Mexican had appeared at an awkward moment for him.

"Come!" cried the intruder, sharply. "I have not all night to wait. You have a paper in your possession with the directions I require. You will give it to me."

"You seem to know all about it," replied Paul, coolly.

"I know that," replied Gonzalez, who did not relish the lad's nerve.

"Do you also know that there is a warrant out for your arrest on the charge of murderous assault against Robinson?"

"I care nothing for that. What are your constables to me? I snap my fingers at them. They are as nothing," and the Mexican grinned contemptuously. "Where is that paper Senor Robinson gave you?"

"Where you are not likely to find it," replied Paul, curtly.

"Carramba! You defy me?" exclaimed Gonzalez, fiercely, advancing a step or two toward the boy, his eyes snapping like coals of fire.

"I want you to get out of this house, Manuel Gonzalez."

"Are you mad that you speak to me in that way?" hissed the Mexican. "Produce the paper or I shall kill you as I would a horse that was balky."

With a quick movement the rascal drew a wicked-looking knife from one of his boots and advanced upon Paul.

The boy grabbed up a chair to defend himself with.

"Did you come here to murder me?" said Paul.

"That is for you to say," responded the Mexican, with a nasty gleam in his eyes. "Your life is of no importance to me—the paper is everything. To you the case is the reverse—the paper nothing, your life everything. Give me the paper and I go. I will also promise make to you. I will send to you \$1,000 out of what I get for the mine. You see that I am liberal," with a shifty grin.

"I will make no bargain with you whatever," retorted Paul, sturdily. "The paper you cannot have. Robinson gave me the mine, and the paper is the only guide by which it may be found. I'm not to be bulldozed like the old man. If you should kill me it will not do you any good. I have hidden the paper where no one but myself can find it. Now you have my answer, and if you try to injure me I will defend myself to the best of my ability."

Paul spoke to the point, not defiantly but resolutely.

He meant what he said, and the Mexican saw that he did.

It was a new sensation for Gonzalez to be bearded to his face by a stripling, and it made him furious.

"You are a fool!" he ejaculated angrily. "You talk loud, but we shall see if you talk the same when I prick the skin over your heart with my knife. If I get not the paper at least I shall make sure that you do not benefit by it yourself."

He rushed upon Paul and grabbed the rungs of the chair as the boy lunged it at him.

Then he made a sweep with his knife that slit a long gash in Clifford's jacket.

Paul was a stout boy for his years, and as he felt that he was fighting for his life he gave the Mexican all he could do to hold his own.

He pushed the rascal into a corner of the room and held him there, avoiding the glittering knife by dexterous dodging.

"I will kill you!" hissed Gonzalez, furiously, making another ineffectual jab.

Placing the knife between his teeth, he grabbed the chair with both hands and with a sudden twist tore it from Paul's hands.

"I have you now!" he cried, springing at the boy.

Paul tried to avoid the clutch of his sinewy arms, but failed, and was seized and borne to the floor, where the Mexican held him powerless.

"Now, you will agree to give me that paper or it will be the last of you," he said, triumphantly, taking the knife from his teeth and poising it above the lad's heart. "You have one minute to decide. Which shall it be? Death or the paper?"

"Neither!" exclaimed a boyish voice behind him, and the rascal felt a vise-like grip close upon the wrist of the hand that held the knife.

CHAPTER VII.

LEAVING HARLEY'S CORNERS.

The newcomer on the scene was Andy Blake, and he had arrived at a most opportune moment for his chum, Paul Clifford.

"Carramba! What is this?" hissed Gonzalez endeavoring to release his wrist.

"No, you don't, you bloodthirsty villain!" returned Andy, holding on with a grip of steel, for his muscles were in fine shape from months of hard training at farm work. "Drop that knife or I'll choke the life out of you," and the speaker threw his other arm about the Mexican's neck and bent his head backward.

Andy had the man practically at his mercy, and the rascal, recognizing the fact, let go of the knife with a volley of foreign oaths.

Blake then pulled him back off his intended victim, and Paul scrambled to his feet.

"Thanks, Andy," said Clifford, gratefully. "You came at the right moment. The scoundrel meant to kill me."

"Carramba! You will let me go," cried the Mexican, struggling to free himself.

"Not on your life I won't. When I let you go it will be to march you to the lock-up. Who is this man, Paul?"

"Manuel Gonzalez, the murderer of Job Robinson."

"Then he did not cut his stick, after all. He has been hiding somewhere in the neighborhood while the constables were hunting for him. Well, we've got him now, and he will go to jail for his crime."

"Ha! You send me to jail? You boys! Pah!"

"Yes, we'll see that you get there. Hunt up a piece of rope to tie him with, Paul. I've got a grip on him that he can't break."

Paul rushed into the store and presently returned with a stout piece of soft Manilla rope.

While Andy held him tight Paul tied his arms and legs, and when he was secure they left him to himself, cursing and scowling horribly.

"This is a nasty weapon," said Andy, picking up the knife.

"It looked pretty fierce to me when he had me down on the floor. But how is it that you so providentially arrived when I most needed you?"

"Mrs. Baxter wanted a yard of a certain goods she bought of your mother a few days ago and she sent me here to get it for her, as the horses will all be employed to-morrow and for the rest of the week, and she wouldn't be able to come in here herself. Where is your mother?"

"Gone to visit a sick neighbor. I expect her back soon now."

"You ought to keep your kitchen door locked. I s'pose that's the way the rascal got in here. I guess he must have surprised you."

"The door was locked and bolted. He evidently forced the door."

"I'd better walk to the village, hadn't I, and bring the head constable back with me?" said Andy. "You don't want this fellow in your house any longer than you can help."

"I wish you would, Andy. I'll keep guard over him while you're gone."

So Andy started for the village without relay.

"You think you have me on the hip, eh?" sneered the Mexican, when he and Paul were alone in the kitchen. "He laughs best who laughs last, young senor."

"I agree with you, Mister Gonzalez," replied the boy, cheerfully. "You had the first laugh, now it is my turn."

"I will yet the laugh have on you, I promise you. You are not out of the woods so long as you hold that paper. It shall yet bring you to grief. I will not lose sight of you until I get it."

"You are talking through your hat, Gonzalez, for you'll soon be in the county jail at Bakersfield, where you will stay until you are brought to trial."

The Mexican made no reply, but his wicked little eyes seemed to speak volumes that meant no good to Paul Clifford.

Mrs. Clifford returned home before Andy got back with the constable, and she was unpleasantly surprised to find her son standing guard over the hard-looking Greaser.

Paul explained matters to her, repressing the worst part of it in order not to alarm her too much.

She did not feel easy, however, until the rattle of wheels outside announced the arrival of the village officer.

The Mexican was speedily and with little ceremony

bundled into the wagon and carried off to the village lock-up.

"It's to be hoped he'll get his just deserts," said Paul to his mother and Andy as the wagon disappeared into the darkness. "He ought to swing for causing the death of Job Robinson."

Mrs. Clifford went into the store and got the yard of dress material that Mrs. Baxter sent Andy for and handed him the bundle.

"It was a mighty lucky thing for me that Mrs. Baxter sent you over to-night?" said Paul, as he walked down as far as the lane with Andy.

"I guess it was. Do you think he really meant to stab you?"

"It looked like it. He seemed determined to get hold of that paper Robinson gave me. I was surprised to think he knew of its existence."

"He's a pretty hard customer to head off. Now that he's behind bolts and bars there's some hope that he won't bother us in the future."

The two boys parted at the lane, Paul returning home.

He said his prayers that night with unusual earnestness, for he was deeply grateful to Heaven for preserving his life.

Next morning Paul and Andy went to the village to appear at the examination of the Mexican.

He was held on the charge of murderous assault against Paul and was sent to the jail at Bakersfield, the county seat, to await trial.

That afternoon Mrs. Clifford received a letter from her only sister, who was living in Chicago, announcing the sudden death of her husband.

She begged Mrs. Clifford to sell out her store at Harley's Corners and come to the Windy City and live with her.

"Well, mother, why don't you do it?" said Paul. "We've only been living from hand to mouth in this place. I, for one, am heartily sick of it."

"I agree with you, Paul," replied his mother, thoughtfully. "The change would be greatly to our advantage. Lucy has a very comfortable home in Chicago, and her husband has left her pretty well provided for. I shall write her that we will come on as soon as I can dispose of the store."

"Write her that you will come, mother. Leave me out of it for the present."

"Why, Paul, I couldn't leave you out here."

"Oh, I'm not going to remain in Minnesota."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I'll tell you, mother. Andy and I have a scheme in hand that will take us to Arizona."

"Arizona!" exclaimed the little widow in dismay.

"Yes, mother."

"And why do you and Andy want to go so far away as that?"

"I want to locate a mine that Job Robinson told me about the night he died."

"A mine!" ejaculated the astonished woman.

"Yes. A gold and silver mine. It means a fortune to me if all goes well."

"You never said anything to me before about this, Paul."

"I know it, for I saw no way of carrying out our plans. I could not leave you here alone in Harley's Corners, for you would never be able to carry on the store and post-office without help, and it would not pay to hire anyone. Now listen and I will tell you the story Robinson told me a short time before he died. That story has something to do with the attack made upon me last night by that Mexican."

Whereupon Paul repeated, as well as he could remember, all that Robinson told him just before his death.

The story astonished Mrs. Clifford.

Paul got the Malacca cane from its hiding place, and, unscrewing the handle, showed his mother the paper which contained the secret directions to find the old abandoned mine.

"I see no reason to doubt Robinson's story, and with this document in my hands I ought to be able to go right to the spot. If the mine is half as valuable as the old man assured me it was, I ought to be able to sell it for a large sum as soon as I have staked it out according to law. Lawyer Green, in the village, the gentleman who collected Andy's wages for him, is pretty well acquainted with mining matters, and I had quite a conversation with him on the subject. He told me how mining lands are marked out and registered, and I took care to make notes of all he said on the subject. I've got the thing down as fine as can reasonably be expected."

"But I don't like the idea of having you go so far away, with only Andy, a boy like yourself, for a companion. It is an unsettled country to a great extent, and you would both be exposed to many hardships and dangers. Isn't there some other way that you can get around it?"

"I'm afraid not, mother. The secret of the mine, if divulged to any one else, would imperil my chance of getting anything out of it. You know what people are in this world. It is everybody for himself, and God for us all. If I took some man into my confidence I would stand a good chance of being cheated out of my rights. There's only one way to secure myself, and that is to do the business in person. Once the mine is properly staked and recorded no one can steal it from me. Then if the ore assays high I can easily find capitalists to take it off my hands at a good price."

"And what would you call a good price, my son?" smiled his mother.

"A few millions, more or less."

"A few millions!" gasped the little widow.

"Sure. It's a pretty poor mine that isn't worth a million or more to the original owner if he knows how to look after his rights."

Mother and son talked the matter over for a long time

that night, and finally Paul won her reluctant consent to his proposed trip to Arizona.

The store was at once advertised for sale in the Bakerfield papers, and several people came to look at it and to inquire into its prospects.

Mrs. Clifford was not able to get her price, but she did better than Paul had any idea that she would in such a short time.

So the place was sold, and Paul and his mother packed up all their personal effects preparatory to leaving Harley's Corners.

The boy bundled into a couple of grips what he thought would be absolutely essential to take with him to Arizona, the balance of his belongings his mother was to carry with her to Chicago.

As it was necessary that both Paul and Andy should appear at the forthcoming trial of Manuel Gonzalez to secure his conviction, it was arranged between the boys that the former should stay in Bakersfield during the intervening time, while Andy retained his job on the Baxter farm until the time arrived when they could start upon their journey to the Southwest.

Ten days before the date set for the trial of the Mexican Mrs. Clifford set out for her sister's home in Chicago, after taking a fond farewell of her son.

She made Paul promise that he would not remain a day longer in Arizona than was necessary for him to carry out the object of his trip.

"And write me as often as you can, dear," she said. "You know that I shall not feel easy in my mind unless I know that everything is going well with you."

"All right, mother. I'll keep you posted about my movements. But you must not expect to hear regularly from me after I leave Tucson for Skull Mountain. It's a kind of wilderness where the mine is, and it may be a week before I can get back to the capital and send you the important news that I have found the mine."

With that Mrs. Clifford had to be content, though naturally she was not thoroughly satisfied.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON BOARD THE CITY OF DULUTH.

In due time Manuel Gonzalez was brought before the Circuit Court of Blank County, Minnesota, and pleaded not guilty of the crime he was charged with.

A lawyer was appointed by the court to defend him and the trial proceeded.

It did not take long to bring all the evidence there was against him before the jury, as Paul and Andy were the only witnesses called.

As the Mexican refused to go on the stand in his own behalf, the lawyer did the best he could with a rocky case.

The jury promptly found him guilty and he was sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary.

The rascal, however, never put on the prison stripes, as he managed to escape from the deputy sheriff who was taking him to the State prison, jumping from the moving

in and eluding every effort made to effect his recapture. Paul and Andy, however, did not hear of this, because before the intelligence of the Mexican's escape reached Sakersfield they had already begun their journey toward Arizona by taking a train to St. Paul, where they expected to ship on a steamboat down the Mississippi as far as St. Louis at least.

They had \$150 in money between them, but they intended to save as much of this as possible by working their way as far as possible toward their destination.

On reaching St. Paul the boys, after getting their dinner at a restaurant, started for the river front.

They found several steamers loading freight for different points down the big river, and they made application at three of the boats unsuccessfully for the chance to work their way to the steamboat's destination.

At the fourth, however, they caught on, much to their satisfaction, and, donning a pair of blue overhauls apiece, they pitched in and hustled as well as any of the regular hands.

The name of the boat was the City of Duluth, and she started down the river at five o'clock.

After the steamer was well on her way the deckhands were piped to supper in a room underneath the main deck, just forward of the engine-room.

Paul and Andy found the provender served out to them to be plain but wholesome, and there was an abundant supply upon the table.

The first stop was made at the town of Hastings, twenty-five miles below St. Paul.

They still had plenty of daylight by which to handle a lot of freight that was waiting for the boat on the end of the wharf.

This was run aboard as fast as hands and trucks could do it, and inside of fifteen minutes the steamboat was on her way again down the river.

At Alma, sixty miles or so below Hastings, several new wagons and some miscellaneous stuff was put on board by the flaring light of naphtha torches.

It was just midnight when the boat hauled out from the wharf and continued on her course.

Paul and his chum then turned into the bunks assigned to them, as there would be no further call for their services until the steamer arrived at Lacrosse, Wisconsin, at about five o'clock next morning.

From Lacrosse the boat made a straight run of something like 120 miles to Dubuque, Iowa, where she hauled in at three in the afternoon and remained about an hour, loading and discharging freight, and taking on passengers.

"Well, Paul, how do you like it as far as you've gone?" asked Andy, when the steamboat was once more heading down the Father of Waters.

"I don't think you've heard me doing any great amount of kicking, have you?" answered his friend.

"The mate keeps us chaps on the jump when we're alongside a landing. This is a considerable sight harder, while it lasts, than guiding a plow."

"You ought to know, Andy, as you've done a good bit of plowing in the last month."

"Yes, I've done my share of that work. How far is it to St. Louis from here?"

"I don't know; but I should think it was between 400 and 500 miles by water."

"Do you know where we stop next?"

"At Davenport."

"How far is that?"

"Say, Andy, what do you take me for—a guide book?"

"No. I thought you knew, for I saw you talking to the mate just after we left Dubuque."

"Well, I asked him what was the next landing we made, and when we would reach it: He said Davenport, and that we were due there at one in the morning. I didn't ask him the distance, but it's over 100 miles all right."

"Then you haven't any idea when we'll reach St. Louis?"

"Yes, I have—six p. m. day after to-morrow."

"Gee! This is a long trip."

"That's because we're on a slow boat. This is a freight steamer, and we carry very few passengers any distance."

"I noticed that a considerable number of persons came aboard at Dubuque."

"They won't go any further than Burlington, where we are due at nine in the morning. It's a fine sail, with a good night's rest, from Dubuque to Burlington. Many persons prefer it to taking the railroad."

The boys hung around the steamer's rail, looking at the panoramic view of the western shore of the river as it slipped by them, talking about their expected adventures in Arizona, until they were called to supper.

At nine o'clock they turned in for a four-hour snooze.

The intermittent lights of Davenport were visible ahead when they were roused up at a quarter to one.

A solitary passenger walked aboard at this landing.

He wore a soft-crowned hat, pulled down over his eyes, and his jaws were bound up as if he had a big boil on his face, or a toothache.

This passenger didn't go to the cabin, but hung around the lower deck watching the deckhands loading and discharging freight.

Suddenly he gave a perceptible start and cast a penetrating look upon Paul Clifford as that lad wheeled a truck load of small boxes up the gangway.

After that he followed the boy's movements wherever he went.

"Ha!" he muttered. "If I mistake not, this boy is on his way to locate the mine. He is working his way down the river, which is a sign that he shall not be flush. Good. It is great luck that I meet him by the way. Carramba! I shall not lose sight of him until I get that paper."

After the steamer left Davenport the passenger, whom the reader has recognized as the escaped Manuel Gonzalez, wandered stealthily around the freight deck until he noticed that the hands had gone to their bunks below.

Then he went forward and sat for an hour looking out

on the dark river, turning over various plans in his scheming brain for getting possession of the important paper he wanted so badly.

At length he got up and made his way cautiously to the opening which led to the deckhands' sleeping quarters.

An upright iron ladder afforded him the means of descent, and soon he was standing, like a shadow, in the narrow compartment the sides of which were lined with rude bunks in tiers of two.

A dull light was diffused through the place from a lantern suspended aloft.

All the occupants of the place were asleep, as was attested by their deep and regular breathing.

After assuring himself that he was unobserved, the Mexican began a tour of the bunks, narrowly examining each sleeper.

At last he paused before one with a chuckle of satisfaction.

Paul Clifford lay stretched there in blissful unconsciousness that his enemy was so close at hand.

His last thoughts of Ganzález were that the rascal had already begun his ten-year sentence in the Minnesota State prison.

He did not dream that the villain had escaped from the grasp of the authorities, and was now at large to interfere with his search for the Arizona mine.

If such a hint had reached him he would have been much disturbed, for he had abundant evidence that the Mexican was a subtle and dangerous factor to cope against.

Bending down to make certain that Paul was asleep, Gonzalez lifted his jacket from the peg by which it was suspended, and deftly searched every pocket.

He found several folded papers, but none was what he wanted.

Then he examined the boy's pocket-book, without success, though he appropriated the six dollars in bills he found in it.

Finally he carefully felt the lining all over.

"Ha! What's this?" he breathed, as his fingers encountered something that felt suspiciously like a fiat wad of paper.

Sinking down beside the bunk he tore the lining loose, and took out the \$150 in big bills Paul had sewn up there.

For a moment the Mexican's eyes gleamed with satisfaction, as he thrust the money into his pocket; but it was followed by a low curse of disappointment, for though the bills were welcome to him, they cut but a small figure beside the important paper.

He searched every inch of the lining for that, but was disappointed.

"Where can he have hidden it?" muttered Gonzales, angrily. "One would think he would have carried it with the money."

He went through Paul's trousers next, though without any great hopes of finding the paper there.

Next he felt under the pillow on which the boy's head rested.

There was nothing there as far as he could discover. Then his eyes lighted on Paul's grips, thrust under the bunk in company with Andy's valise.

He pulled them one by one from their resting-place, and slit them open in turn with the blade of a sharp pocket-knife.

He pulled everything out of them, and examined each article carefully without result.

The Mexican was now at his wit's end, and he glared in ferocious disappointment at the sleeping boy.

He rolled back the blanket and with a light touch felt all over Paul's shirt.

There was not the slightest indication of a paper anywhere.

At that moment his sharp eyes noticed the Malacca cane once the property of Job Robinson.

"Ha! What shall he want to carry that with him for? Of what use is a cane to a boy? It was Robinson's."

He picked it from its nesting spot at the back of the bunk, and began to look it over with critical attention.

As far as he could make out it was merely a stout cane with a thick head carved to resemble a mastiff's face.

"Bah!" he muttered, impatiently, returning it to its former position, never dreaming that his fingers had been within a quarter of an inch of the paper he was so eager to obtain.

He stood in impotent perplexity before the bunk, racking his fertile brain for some clew that would suggest another spot to search.

It was at that moment Andy rolled over and opened his eyes.

He occupied the bunk above Paul's.

The Mexican drew back, but the movement did not escape Andy.

He raised himself on his elbow and looked straight at the intruder.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

Gonzalez squeezed against the adjoining bunk and held his breath.

Andy, however, was wide awake now, and saw the figure.

He reached out suddenly and grasped the Mexican by the shoulder.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked, suspiciously.

The intruder shook off the boy's hand, and in doing so his hat fell off.

He stooped, picked it up, and started for the iron ladder.

The light from the swinging lantern fell full upon his face.

Andy thought he must be dreaming, for the sinister countenance his eyes rested on was the face of Manuel Gonzalez.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANDED.

It was a suspicious circumstance, anyway, that the intruder had refused to make any answer to his hail, and was now hustling up the ladder as fast as he could.

So Andy reached down and shook Paul into wakefulness.

"Wake up, Paul; there's something wrong."

"What's the matter, Andy? What are you talking about?" asked Paul, springing from his bunk in a bewildered kind of way.

"Get on your clothes," said Andy, jumping to the deck and hurriedly getting into his pants. "Who do you suppose I saw just now?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, I saw either Manuel Gonzalez or his ghost."

"You saw Manuel Gonzalez—on board this steamer!" gasped Paul, with a short laugh. "You mean that you dreamed that you saw him?"

"No, I didn't dream it at all. I saw him, or somebody that looked exactly like him, right here a moment ago. He was flattened up against the foot of the adjoining bunk when I woke up suddenly. I didn't know who the man was then. Thought it was one of the deck-hands, and called to him. Receiving no answer, I reached out and grabbed him by the shoulder. He wrenched himself free, dropped his hat, stooped to pick it up, and then I saw his face in the light. Well, say, you could have knocked me over with a feather, for I could have sworn it was the Mexican."

"Nonsense! Gonzalez is in the Minnesota State prison."

"I hope he is; but I have my doubts after what I saw just now."

Paul saw that his companion was not jesting, but thoroughly in earnest.

"I'm going on deck," said Andy, "though I s'pose by this time it will be something of a fool's errand. Whoever that chap was, and whatever his mission down here, he has had time enough to conceal himself among the freight, or if he has a state-room has stolen back to it."

Paul sat down on the edge of his bunk half dressed, and waited for Andy to come back.

The thump of the engine and the jarring of the boat rose above the breathing of the sleepers.

He had not noticed those sounds so plainly as he did now in the silence of the early morning hours.

"Andy, of course, was mistaken in thinking that he actually saw Gonzalez on this boat. That rascal is safe enough in his cell in the State prison, and there is as much chance of his making his escape from there before his term is up as of his sprouting wings and flying. Andy saw somebody that may have looked like him in the poor light down here."

At that moment Paul saw his jacket lying on the deck.

He picked it up and was about to hang it on the peg again when he noticed a section of the lining hanging down.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed, with a sudden sinking at the heart, as he hastily examined the inside of the jacket. "Every cent of our \$150 gone! How careless I was to leave my jacket hanging on that peg. The fellow Andy saw must have been the thief. Yet how could he ever sus-

pect that that money was in the lining? This is hard luck for fair. Andy and I are now practically stranded. Let me see how much I have left in my pocket-book."

When Paul opened that he found that the few small bills he remembered placing in it to meet running expenses were also gone.

He stared at the empty compartment in utter dismay. What were they to do now?"

Cleaned out of all but fifty or sixty cents they were in a pretty bad way indeed.

"Andy will have a fit," groaned Paul, disconsolately. "What ever was it that caused me to sew that money into my jacket when I might have left it in the handle of the cane, where Robinson carried it."

That reflection caused him to look in almost a flutter of apprehension for the cane itself.

Perhaps that had also vanished.

No; it was safe enough where he had left it at the back of the bunk.

"If that was gone I'd throw up my hands, for there wouldn't be a particle of good going to Arizona without that paper. I remember I had half a mind to sew the paper into my jacket with the money instead of bringing the heavy cane along. Had I done so it would have disappeared with the money, and our name would have been Mud. The loss of our money will make considerable difference with us, I'm thinking. We'll have to work our way the entire distance, as well as put in time as we go on in order to accumulate a few dollars for extra expenses."

There was a noise on the iron ladder, and down came Andy.

"I couldn't see any sign of the fellow," he said, pausing before Paul.

"Then we must notify the mate first thing in the morning, because whoever the rascal was he's a thief."

"A thief!" exclaimed Andy.

"Yes. He ripped the lining of my jacket open, and stole our \$150."

"Paul Clifford, you don't mean it!" gasped Andy, in a blue funk.

"Just look at my jacket then. It tells its own tale."

Andy almost collapsed as he noted the torn lining.

"The villain has robbed us!" he groaned. "Has he taken your pocketbook, too?"

"No; but he captured the six dollars I had in it."

"And we're busted?"

"Our entire capital is reduced to 67 cents."

Andy looked the picture of misery.

"How are we going to get to Arizona now? He didn't carry the cane off, too, did he?" he asked, turning almost pale.

"No. If he saw it it did not interest him."

"Thank goodness for that! That would have been the last straw."

"That's what it would."

"Say," said Andy, pointing under Paul's bunk, "those ain't your socks, are they?"

"Sure they are. How came they there? I haven't opened either of my grips since we left Bakersfield."

He hurriedly pulled out his grips, and then the damage done by the Mexican was fully revealed.

The grips were ruined, and the major part of their contents thrust under the bunk.

"Well, if that isn't enough to make a saint swear," cried Paul, angrily. "That chap made a pretty thorough job with my things. Why the dickens did he pick me out to practice on? Why didn't he tackle the property of some of the other hands?"

"Maybe he did, and found nothing," replied Andy, gloomily.

"Well," said Paul, "the captain must hear of this. There is a possible chance of catching the rascal."

"How?" asked Andy, brightening up a bit.

"He can't very well leave the boat till we reach Burlington. As you saw his face you ought to be able to recognize him again. The captain will let you stand by the passenger gang-plank as the people step ashore, and thus you may be able to snatch the fellow."

"He might expect such a thing and go off by the freight gangway."

"Passengers have no right to leave the boat that way. I'll keep my eyes skinned in that direction, and hold up anyone I don't know who tries to slip ashore that way. What sort of looking man did you say he was?"

"He was the dead image of Manuel Gonzalez, in face and height."

"He's got a swarthy complexion, then?"

"He has. All you've got to do is to watch for a person who looks like the Mexican."

"That's easy enough. I'll never forget that fellow if I live to be a hundred."

"Say, let's go upstairs," said Andy. "I couldn't sleep another wink after this affair. We might creep around through the freight on deck. It isn't impossible that we might run foul of the fellow. I don't believe he's a regular passenger. Passengers don't sneak down into the deck-hands' berth to rob them."

"Not as a rule they don't. The chap is evidently a crook who came aboard at Davenport. The purser, who takes up the tickets, may remember what persons came aboard at that landing. There couldn't have been many, for I didn't see a soul on the wharf but the watchman."

Paul pinned up the rents in the lining of his jacket as well as he could, then he and Andy ran up the ladder to the main deck.

They quietly searched through the freight piled all about the deck, but they did not come across any sign of the rascal who had been in the sleeping berth.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL AND ANDY REACH VICKSBURG.

All hands were astir around six o'clock.

As soon as the mate appeared Paul and Andy presented themselves before him and told their story.

The mate looked at Paul's torn vest, and then went down into the deck-hands' sleeping quarters and saw the evidence presented by the ruined grips.

There was no doubting the story that the lads told.

"I'll report the matter to the captain," said the mate. "He will probably take some means to capture the rascal."

At half-past seven Paul and Andy were summoned to the captain's office, and repeated their story to the commander of the City of Duluth.

The purser was sent for, and questioned concerning the passengers who had got aboard at Davenport.

"There was only one, sir. His face was bandaged up as if he had a tooth-ache. He had a through ticket to St. Louis."

"Did he have a dark complexion?" asked Paul.

"Yes. He looked something like a Mexican."

"That's the man," cried Andy.

"We ought to be able to find him on board, even if he removes the bandage," remarked the captain.

"He didn't have any bandage on his face when I saw him in our sleeping quarters," asserted Andy.

"Well, purser, keep your eyes open as you pass through the boat, and when you see the man with the St. Louis ticket ask him to walk into my office."

"Very well, sir."

The captain then directed the mate to allow Andy to watch the passenger gangway while the boat remained at Burlington, and to take such other measures for the capture of the thief as his judgment dictated.

The steamer reached her landing about nine o'clock, and some forty people marched on shore.

Andy scrutinized every one of them, but the dark-featured man was not among the crowd.

As a matter of fact, while the boat was at Burlington this much-sought-after individual was down in the deck-hands' quarters making a thorough search of Paul's bunk for the paper, which of course he did not find.

He paid no attention to the cane, as there was nothing about its looks to invite his suspicions.

Puzzled and angry over his non-success, the Mexican remained below until the throb of the engine and the jar of the boat announced that she had resumed her journey down the river.

He knew the next stop was Keokuk, about forty miles below.

After considering the situation, he decided to leave the boat at that point, if he could do so without observation.

He had seen the boys that morning in consultation with the mate, and he rightly judged that Paul Clifford was making a report of his loss.

He was foxy enough to guess that after the captain had learned about what had happened during the night that he would have the gang-planks watched for a person who answered his description, for he knew that Andy Blake had at least partially recognized him, and he was not sure but the boys had heard of his escape from the custody of the deputy sheriff while on his way to the State prison.

He had discarded his face bandage altogether as being of no further use to him.

Watching his chance he left the sleeping quarters below the main deck, and hid himself in the body of one of the wagons that were ticketed for St. Louis.

Here he felt that he was tolerably safe for the time being.

When the boat hauled out from her wharf Andy reported to the mate that the man he was watching for had not gone ashore at Burlington.

Paul, who had been stationed to watch the forward part of the boat, also made a similar report.

"Then the rascal is still aboard in hiding," replied the mate, "for I had one of the crew on the hurricane deck on the lookout that the fellow did not make an attempt to lower himself overboard from the port side for the purpose of swimming around the boat to the dock above or below."

All hands now were acquainted with the loss the boys had sustained, and had general instructions to watch out for any dark-featured man whose actions looked suspicious.

The steamer arrived at Keokuk at one o'clock, and the same precautions were adopted there.

The Mexican concluded not to risk going ashore here, for, after some cautious observations, he returned to the safety of the wagon, and in due time the boat left her wharf.

Her next landing was at Hannibal, Missouri, sixty miles or so below Keokuk, and her time-table announced her to be due there at six p. m.

She arrived on time.

Gonzalez resolved to leave the steamer at this city at all hazards, as he was famished.

He watched his chance after the gang-plank was put out, and mingled in with a bunch of passengers.

Andy was there on the watch, but he failed after all in singling out the Mexican, and so Gonzalez made his escape undetected from the steamer.

The result was that the boys reached St. Louis on the following afternoon without having recovered their money.

A collection was taken up for them, and the captain also paid them the regular wages for the down-trip, though they had agreed to work for their passage and food alone.

They were allowed to pass the night on board and have breakfast in the morning, then bidding good-by to the mate and the regular deck-hands, they left the wharf with \$16 in Paul's pocketbook.

That afternoon they got a job on a schooner loaded with flour which was bound down for Cairo.

As they had a spanking breeze all the way, they reached Cairo at two o'clock next day, where they put in the rest of the day and the greater part of the following morning unloading the cargo.

This left them about 200 miles southeast of St. Louis, with something over \$20 in cash to carry them further on their journey.

From Cairo they got a chance on a sloop as far as Mem-

phis, and from that city they succeeded in getting free transportation down the river to Vicksburg.

"This ends our cruise on the Mississippi," said Paul, when they stepped on shore at Vicksburg. "We must make for Fort Worth by rail, even if we have to walk the ties."

They crossed the river and wandered into the freight yards about dark.

Here they made the casual acquaintance of one of the yard men.

"So you're strapped and want to reach Fort Worth?" grinned the man.

"That's about the size of it."

"I might manage to help you a bit. You see that freight on yonder track that is being made up now?"

The boys said they saw it.

"That will pull out for Shreveport in about an hour. I'll smuggle you aboard one of the empty box-cars, and some time to-morrow morning you'll find yourselves at the other side of the state."

"How far is Shreveport from here?"

"About 175 miles. It is a junction of the Texas Pacific system, from New Orleans to Texarkana. The straightest road to Fort Worth from Shreveport is to go down to Reisor, another junction, a short distance south, and try to work your way along the Texas Pacific to your destination."

"What's the best way to reach Tucson, Arizona?" asked Paul.

"The Texas Pacific runs straight from Fort Worth to El Paso, which is at the extreme western end of Texas. From that point the Southern Pacific crosses the lower corner of New Mexico, and the southern section of Arizona. The line passes through Tucson."

"Well, we're bound for Tucson. The problem that confronts us is to get there without paying the fare."

"I'm afraid you're going to have a hard time doing it," laughed the yardman. "However, I'll do my share toward getting you there by giving you a lift as far as Shreveport."

Thus speaking he led the way across the tracks, and presently the two boys were stowed in an empty box-car that was to carry them almost clear across the state of Louisiana.

CHAPTER XI.

TUCSON AT LAST.

Three weeks later two dusty-looking, travel-stained boys alighted from an empty freight car at Tucson, Arizona, on the line of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Their names were Paul Clifford and Andy Blake, and they looked as if they had received a good many hard bumps since they left the banks of the Mississippi river.

Paul carried a disreputable grip in one hand, and Job Robinson's dog-faced Malacca cane in the other, while Andy lugged the same valise he had brought all the way from Harley's Corners.

"Tucson at last" exclaimed Paul, with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"It's about time," grinned Andy. "I thought we'd never get here."

"After what we've been through trying to get here the hundred miles between this place and Skull mountain won't seem anything," said Paul.

"That's right; it won't. If we haven't roughed it ever since we left Shreveport to beat the band I don't know what you call it."

"You're right, Andy, we've had a fierce time."

"Fierce! Well, say, I thought my time had come more than once. We've been up against it hard. I feel as if I can stand anything now. That last jolt we got in New Mexico from the train was something to make the angels weep. I thought I was a gone goose for fair. They must have taken us for the India-rubber twins."

"They were only practicing on us, Andy, so as to get their hands in," laughed Paul.

"Only practicing, eh? Did they tell you that? If they did they were filling you up. They went for me as though I had been stealing rides as a regular diversion. If I didn't have good long legs what they wouldn't have done to me isn't worth mentioning."

"Well, never mind the past. That's over and done with. Only a hundred miles stands between us and a fortune if there's truth in Robinson's story."

"Don't say if it's true, Paul. We've banked pretty heavily on its truth. If it should turn out to be a fake yarn after all we've been through, I'd want to go and drown myself."

"Don't worry, Andy. The story of the abandoned mine is true enough. I've the fullest confidence in Job Robinson's statement. No man, unless he was crazy, would invent such a yarn on his death-bed, and I'm willing to swear that Robinson wasn't crazy."

The boys inquired the way to a cheap hotel, and were directed to the Canyon House, on Phoenix street, not far from the post-office.

They registered, and were shown to a plainly furnished square room in the end of the house.

"Supper will be ready in an hour, young gents," said the proprietor, who was also his own clerk part of the time, when Paul and Andy returned downstairs after having gotten rid of some of the grime accumulated during their rough experience across the continent from Shreveport, Louisiana.

Andy licked his chops on hearing this welcome news, for neither had enjoyed a square meal for nearly a month.

"Supper will be ready in an hour," grinned Andy. "That sounds good, doesn't it? I'm afraid the table is going to suffer as soon as I get my legs under it. I'm so hungry I could eat a whole big beefsteak with all the fixings."

"As this is a cheap hotel I'm thinking you'll have to satisfy your appetite by degrees," laughed Paul.

"Oh, lor! Don't say that," replied Andy, dolefully.

"Well, we'll see what we'll see when we reach the dining-room," replied Paul, encouragingly.

The landlord was curious to learn where his visitors had come from, where they were going, and how long they expected to remain at his house.

"We're going over to Skull mountain," replied Paul.

"Skull mountain!" ejaculated the hotel man, in astonishment. "Why there? Do you know the character of the country between here and the Ajo range? It is the same as a desert. You won't find a dozen houses south of the railroad between here and Skull mountain, which is the advance peak of the Ajo range. No one but prospectors go out there, and not many of them. You look too young and inexperienced for that business. So far I have not heard that any gold or silver has been found in that district."

"How far is Skull mountain from Tucson?" asked Paul.

"How far? All of 100 miles."

"How far from the railroad?"

"The nearest point of the railroad is, I should think, forty miles from the mountain, but the range itself runs up to the track."

Paul conversed with the landlord of the Canyon House until the bell rang for supper, which was a signal for both of the boys to make a break for the dining-room.

They were the first at the table, and their appetites astonished the girl who waited on them.

Supper was only a secondary meal at the hotel, so Paul had to tip the waitress off as an inducement to stretch the bill-of-fare for their especial benefit.

Even at that Andy declared when they came away that he had only had half enough to eat.

After supper Paul and Andy wandered around town and took in the sights.

They met a number of rough characters, many of them Mexicans on a par with Manuel Gonzalez.

The boys did not attract any special attention, as they would had they looked prosperous.

When night descended on the town the liquor saloons, always open, blossomed out into light and revelry, while the gambling dens began to come to life, and fill up with patrons, largely from the rough element, which formed the floating population of Tucson.

Anyone could enter these places and stay as long as he pleased.

Tables were provided for private games of chance, the revenue to the house coming in the shape of frequent orders on the bar.

When intoxicated customers got too noisy and belligerent, they were ejected by the bouncers, who carried revolvers at their hips.

This method of maintaining a semblance of order often led to impromptu shooting scraps, in which somebody as a rule got hurt, even if one or more subjects were not furnished for an inquest next day.

"This is a pretty hot old town, isn't it?" said Andy,

After they had taken in all they cared to see, and were on their way back to the Canyon House.

"That's what it is," replied Paul. "I'd rather be excused from living here as a steady thing."

"Nothing short of a gold or silver mine would make me stay around these diggings, you can gamble on that."

Although not aware of the fact, the boys were followed by a dark-skinned man whose soft-crowned hat was pulled down well above a pair of sinister eyes.

This shadower was none other than Manuel Gonzalez, who had been several weeks in Tucson on the watch for their appearance.

Not having been able to get possession of the paper which contained the directions for finding the entrance to the disused galleries of the Skull mountain mine, the Mexican had laid other plans for accomplishing his purpose.

Now that the boys had really showed up in Tucson, he was certain that Paul Clifford had brought with him the knowledge that would disclose the way to the mine, and he determined to follow the lads to the Ajo range, capture Paul on the ground, and then having the boy completely in his power, force him to give up the secret.

He had arranged with a number of desperadoes of his own brand to assist him in the affair, promising to divide a certain percentage of his eventual winnings among them.

Consequently the outlook ahead of the two boys was exceedingly dubious.

Gonzalez traced them to the Canyon House.

When he saw his chance he walked to the desk and examined the register.

He noted the fact that Paul and Andy had arrived there some time that afternoon.

"Good. They will not stay in town long, but head for the range as soon as they can make their arrangements for the trip. When they reach Skull mountain I shall treat them to a nice little surprise. Carramba! This time I shall not fail."

Stroking his jet-black mustache in a satisfied way, the Mexican turned on his heel and left the Canyon House.

CHAPTER XII.

PHINEAS QUILL.

Paul and Andy spent the greater part of the next day there, and laid out nearly all of their little capital in southwestern section of Arizona.

They hired a couple of stout ponies to carry them there, and laid out nearly all of their little capital in blankets, provisions for a week or ten days' stay, and certain mining implements that they thought they might need.

They also took with them a steel measuring tape and a small compass for the purpose of laying out the claim if they were successful in finding the exact position of the mine.

"I guess we've got about everything we need, haven't we?" asked Andy, when they were sitting in the public room of the hotel waiting for the supper bell.

"We've got about everything we've the funds to pay for," replied Paul.

"Then we'll start for the range in the morning," said Andy.

Paul shook his head.

"We'll start after supper. The landlord has advised me to do our traveling at night, when the air is a great deal cooler than after the sun comes up. He said the best plan for us is to make straight across the plain for the Quijotoa range, sixty miles distant, which we ought to reach by sunrise if we maintain a good pace. There we can find shady spots to sleep during the heat of the day. When the sun is well down we can resume our journey in a northwesterly direction along the foot-hills of the range, for say twenty miles—that is, if we strike the range about the center, which we should do if we traveled due west from this town. Then we'll come to the end of the range with a twenty mile strip of plain between us and Skull mountain, which we cannot miss, owing to its height and peculiar skull-like formation. It lies north by west from the end of the Quijotoa mountains."

Andy offered no objection to this arrangement, for he regarded Paul as the leader of the enterprise, and whatever he said was all right.

So after supper the boys, with all their property strapped to the backs and sides of their stout animals, departed from Tucson for the Quijotoa range.

Unconsciously they had stolen a march on Manuel Gonzalez, for that rascal had no suspicion they would start at night.

He expected them to leave Tucson on the following morning, and had notified his crowd of desperadoes to be prepared to start out at a moment's notice.

He visited the Canyon House early in the morning for the purpose of keeping an eye on his victims.

After hanging around for an hour he learned to his anger and chagrin that the boys had left town at dark the evening before.

He hurried to the place where his crowd was stopping, and ordered them to mount their horses, and start at once, as their quarry had left Tucson hours before, and were probably already half-way to Skull mountain.

The Mexican and his gang did not lay their course for the Quijotoa range, but made a bee-line for Skull mountain.

Paul and Andy rode through the night at a smart pace across the plain, and at dawn saw the mountains rising straight before them.

They reached the foot-hills at sunrise, and kept on to the northwest until they came to a densely wooded ravine which Paul decided would make a first-class camping spot, as there was not only plenty of shade, but a stream of pure water flowing through it.

So they hobbled their animals where there was plenty

of grass, ate their breakfast of cold meat and bread, washed down with a cup of cold bottled coffee, and then turned in under the trees for a good sleep.

They judged that it was three o'clock by the position of the declining sun when they awoke thoroughly refreshed.

It didn't take them long to eat their supper, reload their animals, and resume their journey along the foot-hills.

By following a course indicated by the compass, they saved much time that they otherwise would have used up in winding in and out through the lower mountain reaches.

It was eight o'clock when they began to leave the Qujotoa range behind them.

"Skull mountain is about twenty miles distant," said Paul. "By keeping close to our present course, which we can easily do by occasionally watching the compass, we should be able to sight the peak in this clear air before midnight. So you see, Andy, before many hours we'll be right on the ground where the deserted mine is."

"Then we'll be able to see what that document you have amounts to."

"I'm in hopes it will amount to a million at least."

"A million!" grinned Andy. "That's a lot of money, Paul."

"Yes. It's quite a pile."

"How are you going to put a value on this mine if we bring it to light?"

"By taking out specimens of the ore and having it assayed. Then I mean to get an expert miner to thoroughly examine the mine and report upon it. Of course, this could not be done until we have staked out the claim."

The boys only conversed at intervals as they galloped across the plain.

After a couple of hours they began to make out the distant Ajo range limned against the horizon, for the air was as clear as crystal, and the night one of the brightest they had ever seen.

As they approached the mountains one peak, taller than the rest, separated itself from the range and stood out in bold relief against the sky.

"A dollar to a doughnut that is Skull mountain," cried Paul, pointing toward it.

"I guess you're right," acquiesced Andy.

The boys, more anxious than ever to reach their destination, urged their animals to a quicker pace, and the ground seemed fairly to fly under them.

Suddenly they both heard a hail to their left.

"What's that?" said Paul, reining in, an example followed immediately by his companion.

The cry was repeated.

"It comes from the ground a short distance away," said Andy.

They walked their horses in the direction of the shout, and presently observed a man lying on the ground.

Paul dismounted and went up to him.

"What's the matter?" he inquired. "Are you hurt?"

"Yes. My right leg is either sprained or broken. I'm

not quite sure which," was the reply, "though I think it's the former."

"How did it happen?"

"I was thrown by my nag about an hour ago," answered the stranger, making a wry face as he moved his injured leg.

"That was hard luck," replied Paul.

"I should say it was. If you chaps hadn't come along I don't know what would have become of me."

"Where were you bound for?"

"The mountains yonder. I'm on a prospectin' jaunt. I left Tucson a couple of days ago well fixed for a month's trip in the Ajo range, and now look at me. My horse has gone the deuce knows where with my traps. I'm stranded for a fact, not counting my injured limb."

"I'm glad we came across you," said Paul, "for you might have died here all alone."

"That ain't any lie, my young friend. I'm mighty thankful you came along. I'd be glad to know who you are and where you're headin' for. My name is Phineas Quill. What's yours?"

"Paul Clifford is my name. My companion's is Andy Blake. We're bound for Skull mountain."

"Skull mountain, eh? What's takin' you to that lord-forsaken spot?" asked the injured prospector, in surprise.

"A little matter of business," replied Paul, evasively, not caring to impart the nature of their journey to a complete stranger.

"Well, pards, I was goin' to Skull mountain myself, so if you'll give me a lift on one of your horses I'll consider it a favor. I s'pose you ain't been out here before, have you?"

"No," answered Paul.

"Then maybe I can be of some use to you, if you're goin' to stay awhile. I can point out a first-rate campin' spot."

"Then you've been at Skull mountain before?"

"Yes, several times. The fact of the matter is I'm huntin' for an old mine that was worked and then abandoned by the Mexicans more'n a century ago."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Paul, somewhat startled. "How did you hear about it?"

"I learned about it while I was prospectin' along the State line six months ago. An old peon gave me the story, and assured me that it was true; but he couldn't say just what part of the mountain it's located in. I've been out here twice on a still hunt, but I couldn't find no sign of payin' dirt. I shan't give it up, though, for I reckon if it's there I may come across it in time, especially as the old Mexican said the mouth to the main shaft is somewhere along the foot-hills."

Paul looked thoughtfully at the man.

"Are you an experienced miner?" he asked.

"Yes, siree; that's just what I am."

"Then you could size up the value of a mine from an inspection of the ore you found in it, could you?"

"I could. I've done that many a time for other chaps who were luckier than me in their finds."

"Have you ever staked out claims?"

"That's what I have, pard. Hundreds of 'em, in my time."

"All right," said Paul. "Now, I'd like to make you a proposition."

"I'm a-listenin'. I'm open to anythin' there's money in."

"You say you haven't the least idea where this Skull mountain mine is?"

"Nary idea; but I'm hopin' to find it."

"S'pose I tell you that we're bound straight for that same mine, what would you say to going in with us on a quarter share of what we get out of it?"

"What's that? You bound straight for that mine?" exclaimed the man.

"That's what I said."

"How did you hear about it?"

"From an old prospector named Job Robinson."

"Job Robinson! Why, I had an old partner by that name some years ago. What did he look like?"

Paul described the man.

"By thunder! The very chap! Where did you meet him? I ain't seen him for six years. He was the squarest man I ever met. Where is he now?"

"He's dead."

"Sho, you don't say! I'm sorry to hear that. Did Job discover this mine?"

"He did, and was scared off by a villainous Mexican named Manuel Gonzalez."

"I know the rascal. Saw him in Tucson the day before I left there."

"What!" exclaimed Paul, astonished. "You saw Manuel Gonzalez in Tucson within a few days?"

"I did. I know the scoundrel well. He ought to be in jail."

"Why, he was convicted of murderous assault in Bakersfield, Minnesota, the day before Andy and I left there, and sent to the state prison for ten years."

"In Minnesota!" exclaimed Phineas Quill. "When was that?"

"About five weeks ago."

"Then the rascal must have escaped, for I saw him in Tucson three days ago. That I'll swear to," said the prospector emphatically.

Paul was simply amazed.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT SKULL MOUNTAIN.

"Look here, Mr. Quill, I guess you're an honest man," said Paul.

"I hope I am," replied the prospector, emphatically. "I ain't wronged no man that I knows of."

"Wel, I'm going to tell you the whole story of the Skull mountain mine."

"I'd like to hear it, pard. I s'pose you ain't got a drop of whisky in your outfit, have you?"

Paul shook his head.

"That isn't in our line, Mr. Quill."

"I s'pose not," replied the prospector, in a tone of disappointment. "I'll allow it ain't good for boys like yourselves, though it's handy for you to have if you get took sick out in this here wilderness."

"We never thought about getting sick," replied Paul. "We've been up against hard luck for the past month, and we're none the worse off for it."

"What kind of hard luck?" asked the prospector, with a look of interest.

"Beating our way from Louisiana to Arizona by rail."

"I see. You ain't very flush with money, then?"

"We're as near dead broke at this minute as we're ever likely to be."

"Well, let me have your story, then we'll move on for the mountains."

So Paul commenced at the beginning and told Phineas Quill how Job Robinson had come to live at Harley's Corners, an obscure little hamlet in Minnesota; how he had made the old man's acquaintance; how he and Andy had found him knocked out one evening under an old oak tree by the roadside; how they had carried him to the store, where he died that night from the injuries he had sustained at the hands of Manuel Gonzalez, who had followed him through many states to wring from him the secret of the Skull mountain mine.

Then Paul repeated to their new acquaintance the story Robinson had told him before he died.

"So Job Robinson made you his heir, eh?" said Phineas Quill.

"He did. He gave me the paper which he said contained exact directions locating the entrance to the abandoned mine."

The prospector uttered a whistle.

"If you've got that, pard, you may consider your fortune made if Robinson said that he found indications of rich ore in sight."

"He said so. In fact, he said in his opinion the mine as it stood was easily worth a million."

"And Job allowed himself to be euchred out of that by that measly Mexican? I can't understand for the life of me why he got so faint-hearted all of a sudden."

"That rascal is a mighty tough proposition," replied Paul. "I was up against him myself one night. He found out some way that Robinson had put his secret on paper and gave it to me, and he tried to get me to give it up. Andy turned up at the right moment to save me. I'm afraid we'll have more trouble from him if he's in Tucson, as you say he is."

"He was there three days ago as certain as death," asserted Phineas Quill, positively.

"Then you can bet your life that was the rascal who came aboard the City of Duluth at Davenport that night and robbed you of our money, Paul," said Andy, chipping in for the first time. "He was hunting for that paper as sure as you live. Look how he went through your grips."

"As things look now I wouldn't be at all surprised but you are right," said Paul. "However, we have the satisfaction of knowing that he didn't find the paper. It's a wonder we didn't hear from him in Tucson. It must be that he didn't learn of our arrival in town."

"Gee! I hope not," replied Andy. "If he saw us he'd be sure and follow us out here."

"Well, he'd better not," said Phineas Quill, in a significant tone, as he tapped his hip-pocket. "I'd as soon shoot him as I would a snake, and a deal sight sooner now that I know he caused my old pard Robinson's death. Are you boys heeled?"

"You mean are we armed?" asked Paul.

"That's just what I do mean."

"No. We didn't have the price. It took all the funds we saved to fit us out half-way decent for this trip. We had to hire the horses at that."

"We had \$150 when we left Minnesota, but that Mexican stole every dollar of it one night on the boat we were working our way down the Mississippi on," said Andy. "I almost caught the villain, but he managed to get away and hide somewhere on the boat, and he got ashore at one of the landings in spite of the fact that Paul and I were on the lookout for him. Paul didn't believe it was Gonzalez, because the rascal was supposed to be in prison at that time; but I had got a good view of him when he was down in our sleeping quarters, and I thought it must be him or his ghost."

"Well, it's too bad you haven't guns, then we could give that chap and any pals he might bring with him a warm reception if he comes out here. However, we can keep our eyes skinned and not let him get the drop on us. I can hit the ace of clubs five times out of six at fifteen yards, so it wouldn't be healthy for him to get too gay with me."

"If you're ready, Mr. Quill, we'll give you a lift on my horse as far as our destination."

"All right. I shan't forget it, pard. As to that proposition of yours, I'll take you up and see you through with the mine if you can hit it with that paper you have. I'll help you stake the claim out in proper fashion, so you can have it registered accordin' to law. If it pans out well it will be a good thing for me."

Andy dismounted and helped Paul assist the prospector to mount the horse, then they continued their journey at a walk, the boys taking turns riding the other horse.

Gonzalez and his associates had already reached Skull mountain, and were lying in wait for the boys.

They had expected to find them there ahead of them, and the Mexican was somewhat surprised because they found no trace of them on the ground; but came to the conclusion that as the lads were unfamiliar with that part of the country they had probably gone astray, and would turn up later on.

But for the fact that Paul and Andy had met with Phineas Quill they would have run right into the trap prepared to receive them.

Quill, however, induced them to diverge from the straight line they had intended following, and went around the foot-hills to the southeast, in order to reach the camping-ground he had spoken to them about.

Thus they passed within half a mile of the spot where the Mexican and his followers were waiting for them without the rascals being aware that they were in the vicinity.

The camping-place selected by the prospector was a secluded nook at the base of Skull mountain, several miles from the place indicated on the paper as the spot where the abandoned mine was situated.

It was an ideal camping-ground from many points of view, having shade and a plentiful supply of running water at hand.

It also offered complete concealment, both from the plain around and the elevated points behind.

"Here you are as snug as a bug in a rug," laughed Quill. "No fear of anyone stealin' the horses or your traps, unless he knew the place or stumbled on it by accident."

"We expected to pitch our camp in the open, close by the entrance to the mine," remarked Paul.

"That's where you would have been foolish," said the prospector, "for you couldn't tell when some rascal might come that way and get away with your things while you were both in the underground galleries of the mine, looking the place over. Now all you have to do is to start out from here with your compass and whatever you need to make your observations and measurements with, and leave the balance of your traps in my care till you return. When you have found the entrance to the mine perhaps I'll be able to use my pins and go along with you to explore it, and see what the prospects are."

"That's right, Mr. Quill. You have simplified matters a good bit for us. We are pretty green at this business, so I guess it was rather lucky that we came across you."

"It was lucky for me at any rate, pard, that you did, and I'm goin' to do the right thing by you for it."

"That's all right, Mr. Quill. You're welcome. I'm glad to find that you were an old friend of Job Robinson's. I daresay if he was alive he'd be happy to put something in your way. If the mine should turn out to be worth a million, why, you will rake in a quarter of it, and that ought to satisfy you for the rest of your days."

"I reckon it would, pard. I think I'd go back East where I came from, and cut a wide swath. I'm a hummer from hummerville when I get started."

The boys laughed at the quaint way the prospector made the remark.

"A man can hum pretty loud on a quarter of a million, but he sometimes lands in the poor-house in the end," said Paul. "If this mine turns up trumps I'd advise you to soak your share where it will do you the most good for the rest of your days."

"Your advice is good, pard, and I'll consider it when the occasion arises. In the meantime I'm goin' to turn over for a snooze, and advise you chaps to do the same so you'll be in shape for business in the mornin'."

Paul and Andy agreed with him, and in fifteen minutes peace and comparative silence reigned in the little camp.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEXICAN'S REVENGE.

Paul awoke at sunrise, but his two companions still slept on.

Not caring to sleep any longer, and unwilling to disturb them, the boy got up, ate a meat sandwich, and drank some of the bottled coffee.

The cool morning air offered inducements for a stroll, and Paul decided to take advantage of it.

He had bought a small leather prospecting bag in Tucson to hold the compass, a geologist's hammer, and a few other things.

He strung this over his arm, and also took the precious paper from its hiding place in the head of the cane, for he had some idea of walking over to the northeast corner of the mountain and taking a few preliminary observations from the measurements written down by Job Robinson.

He did not dream of what awaited him in that direction.

The entire landscape looked so lonesome and deserted to his eye when he left the camp, after taking careful note of its location so that he could be sure of finding it again, that he did not suspect there were any strangers within miles of that spot.

But we all live and learn new facts from experience, which sometimes is a dear teacher.

At any rate, Paul received a rude jolt before he was more than an hour older.

As he stopped to consult the paper for the purpose of making his first observation, Manuel Gonzalez caught sight of him, and uttered a chuckle of joy at seeing that he was not only alone, but that he held a paper, presumably the document he wanted, in his hand.

As luck would have it Paul put down his leather bag and commenced operations near the very hole Job Robinson had tumbled into, and which mishap had led to his discovery of the mine.

Gonzalez crept back to the little cave in the rocks where his brother ruffians were asleep, awoke them, and pointing out the busy lad to them, told them to creep around in his rear, come upon him suddenly, and capture him.

There were five besides the Mexican in the party, and they lost no time in obeying the order of their leader.

At the moment Paul took up his bag to get the compass he suddenly found himself seized from behind, and looking up saw that he was a prisoner in the hands of as fine a set of villains as one would hate to meet at a disadvantage.

To complete his misery, up stepped the Mexican himself, and Paul had no reason to doubt that he was face to face once more with Manuel Gonzalez.

The villain's countenance fairly shone with satisfaction and gratified malice.

"Well, Senor Clifford, we meet again," he said with a

diabolical grin. "The last time it was in the court at Bak-ersfield, Minnesota, a month ago, when you thought the whip hand you had of me. Carramba! The tables now are what you call turned. Is it not so? You are silent, young senor. You do not relish that I now am on top of the heap. That I have you where I want you. That, I suppose, is the paper which you so cunningly have hidden from my eyes. Ah, Senor Clifford, you are, shall I say, a clever boy; but you are not the match for me. You have led me the long dance. Now it is that you pay the piper."

He snatched the paper from the boy's fingers and looked it over eagerly.

"Aha! This is what Senor Robinson would not that I should see. At last it is mine. It will be as the key to open to us the long-deserted mine. I thank you, young senor, for coming so far to present this to me in my hands," mockingly. "It is but fair that we repay you for this service. What shall we do with him, comrades?" he asked appealing to his desperadoes. "Shall we let him return to Tucson to say that we have robbed him, or shall we sew up his tongue that he be forever silent on the matter?"

"Sew up his tongue!" roared one of the husky ruffians who had hold of the boy's arm.

And this appeared to be the unanimous sentiment of the five rascals.

"You hear, Senor Clifford," leered the Mexican. "It would not be safe for us that we let you go now that we have the paper. You will remember I told you that night you had me on the hip that I yet would have the laugh on you. You see it all come true. You thought your big prison in the north would hold me tight. Carramba! The prison is not yet built that can hold Manuel Gonzalez. But this is waste time. Your companion may come this way, and we would have to deal with him the same as with you if he saw what would make trouble for us. It is better for him that he see nothing. Get a lariat and tie the young senor."

One of the villains hurried away, and presently returned with a long rope.

With one end Paul's arms were bound securely behind his back, leaving the other end trailing behind.

The Mexican walked away, and Paul saw him gathering dry strips of brush which he fashioned in the form of a torch.

The gang waited for him to come back, two of them perched upon a big boulder, two holding the boy by the arms, while the fifth stood back holding the loose end of the rope, as though he was a wild steer they were trying to manage.

The ruffians amused themselves tantalizing the lad, and making various mean suggestions as to his ultimate fate.

Gonzalez came back slowly, as if he was considering something.

Finally he paused on the edge of the brush-lined hole and peered down into it.

He could not see down to the bottom, though he parted

the brush at the mouth, so he drew a silver match-safe from his pocket, took out a lucifer, ignited it on his trouser leg, and applied the flame to the end of the impromptu torch.

The dry twigs caught fire readily enough, and the Mexican waved it around in the air until it blazed up freely.

He thrust it into the mouth of the hole, and the glare it afforded showed him the depth of the opening in the ground.

He saw there was water at the bottom, and he smiled grimly.

"The sun is beginning to grow hot, Senor Clifford," he said, with a malicious chuckle. "This hole will be as a cool spot for you where you shall not get sun-burned. When you get thirsty there is water to drink below. If that satisfy you not—carramba!—you shall be hard to please. Come, Martin, you and Dalton will drop him down now, for we have no more time to waste on him."

The five ruffians seemed to enjoy the plan hit upon by their leader for the lingering extermination of the lad.

"You're a pack of cowards!" cried the brave boy, breaking his dogged silence for the first time. "Six against one! If you had a spark of manliness in you you would give me a chance for my life; but it isn't in you. You are curs, every one of you!"

The gang uttered a roar of coarse laughter at his words.

"At last I have got you to your knees!" grinned Gonzalez. "You shall not be quite so spunky as at Harley's Corners, when you laugh in my face, and tell me that you are the whole thing. It shall be pleasant to see you squeal. Carramba! You beg for mercy, eh? It will not do you any good. Down with him, comrades!"

As the two ruffians forced him toward the pit, Paul recoiled from the horrible fate designed for him.

"Dead boys tell no tales!" exclaimed Gonzalez, with an exultant laugh, as he cast the torch into the dark hole.

In spite of his struggles the plucky lad was forced to the edge of the pit.

"There is water at the bottom to break your fall, Senor Clifford. Perhaps it is better that you say your prayers now in case it shall be of such depth that you get not the chance after you are down there."

Paul was held over the edge for the space of a single minute, then at a sign from the Mexican the two scoundrels who had hold of him pushed him in.

He went down like a stone, a loud splash followed, and then—silence.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE SKULL MOUNTAIN MINE.

The water at the bottom of the hole was not as deep as Gonzalez had believed it was, not much over four feet, so that it did not rise above the boy's armpits after he struck the bottom.

The shock of the fall, however, stunned Paul, and but

for the fact that the end of the trailing rope caught on a projecting rock and thus held him upright he would undoubtedly have been drowned in a few minutes.

As it was he lay back unconscious and bleeding from a cut in his head.

Not hearing any sound from him, the Mexican judged that he had gone under the surface of the water, and lay there drowning.

He and his ruffians listened for several minutes, and silence continuing it was their unanimous opinion that Paul Clifford was done for.

"Come," said Gonzalez at last, "we will to the business of finding this mine. The boy shall rot where he lies and no one will be the wiser."

The Mexican picked up the leather bag, and started off for the cave, where they had slept, in order to study the paper, while his associates followed at his heels.

At the camp Andy woke up half an hour after Paul left the place on his early jaunt.

He got up, looked around, and was surprised to see no sign of his companion.

"Where has he gone?" he asked himself.

While he was trying to figure the matter out Phineas Quill opened his eyes and sat up.

"I don't know where Paul has got to," Andy remarked.

"Oh, he's somewhere around. Get up on that rock and take a squint around the plain."

Andy did so.

"I don't see anything of him," he shouted down. "But I tell you what I do see—a horse with a couple of packs on his back grazing close by."

"That's my nag," exclaimed the prospector, standing up and limping to a place whence he could get a view of the spot indicated by Andy. "That's the rascal, all right," he added. "I wish you'd go down and catch him. You'll have no trouble, I think. Then you can lead him here and picket him with the others."

Andy cheerfully carried out Quill's directions.

The stout animal allowed himself to be captured without the slightest opposition, and followed Andy to the camp.

"I'm as pleased as a hog on ice to get my traps again," said the prospector, with a satisfied grin. "My leg seems to be comin' around all right, too."

As Paul did not show up in fifteen minutes, Quill told Andy to build a fire and he'd cook some coffee and fry some bacon for breakfast.

The fire was started.

"Now hand me that fryin' pan and coffee pot, and them packages, and I'll start the grub under way."

In twenty minutes breakfast was waiting for the absent one.

"I'd give something to know where he went off to," said Andy, anxiously. "Maybe he can't find the camp again."

"Well, take a look along the foot-hills and see if there's any sign of him," said the prospector, helping himself to a share of the bacon, bread and coffee.

Andy returned shortly to say that Paul wasn't anywhere in sight.

"Then eat your breakfast. We'll keep his share warm on the embers."

So Andy, who was pretty hungry, appropriated his share of the grub, and soon disposed of it.

Having finished his meal, the prospector took his pipe from his pocket, filled it, and commenced to smoke, while Andy mounted the rock once more on the lookout for his chum.

After Manuel Gonzalez had gone over the paper containing the directions for locating the mouth of the tunnel communicating with the underground galleries of the mine he was satisfied that he would be able to find it.

While he was thus employed one of the gang had prepared breakfast.

As soon as it was ready all hands squatted around the cave and helped themselves without ceremony to whatever they saw.

The meal over, the Mexican called on three of his followers to help him in his search.

They left the cave, and with Gonzalez bossing the job got down to business.

Gonzalez soon ran against a snag.

One of the marks left by Robinson to identify a certain spot had disappeared.

As it was the most important one, it threw all the other calculations out so that after an hour's work the Mexican woke up to the unpleasant fact that the paper was absolutely of no use to him, and that he was just as much at sea as he ever had been.

Time and the changes made by nature had rendered all his scheming and manœuvering of years abortive.

Even Job Robinson himself, had he been on the ground, could not have discovered the opening to the underground passages by means of his own document.

He could have found his way into the mine through the original hole, of course.

And it was into this very hole that Paul Clifford had been thrown by his malignant enemy.

Manuel Gonzalez, however, knew nothing about the secret passage which opened into the side of that hole.

If he had he surely never would have cast the boy down there.

Gonzalez and his disappointed crowd could only commence a close search along the base of the foothills on the chance of discovering the mouth of the tunnel by sheer good luck, and so we will leave them to that laborious occupation under the boiling rays of the sun, while we descend into the hole where Paul had been left to his fate, and see how the boy was getting on.

Paul remained unconscious the best part of an hour.

When he came to his senses he saw he was standing in about four feet of water, thirty odd feet below the surface of the ground.

There was as much chance for him to crawl up the per-

pendicular sides of the hole as there was for an elephant to fly.

Apparently he was down there for good and all, face to face with a slow death.

"Neither Andy nor Mr. Quill would ever think of looking for me down here," murmured the boy in an almost disheartened tone. "I must remain here until I die from sheer exhaustion. Then some day my skeleton will be found and people will wonder just how I came to my end."

It was while Paul was a prey to these dismal thoughts that the experience of Job Robinson in just such a hole, resulting in the discovery of the Skull mountain mine, occurred to him.

"It was lucky for him that the hole into which he tumbled had an outlet on its side. If this was only the same hole I'd have some chance of——"

As he spoke he looked up and around the narrow sides of the hole in a desperate hope that a slice of the same kind of blind luck might happen to him.

His eyes were now accustomed to the gloom down there, which was scarcely penetrated by the light above that filtered through the brush obstructing the mouth of the hole.

"The place that Robinson tumbled into had several feet of water at the bottom, just as this has. Suppose this was the very same hole?" he exclaimed, with a thrill of hope. "There's a dark patch right above my head. I'll climb up this rope and see what it is."

The shock of his descent into the hole being suddenly arrested by the catching of the long piece of rope on the rock had loosened the bonds that had bound his arms, and he easily drew them free.

He pulled himself up a yard, and discovered to his great delight that the black patch in question was indeed an opening into the solid rock.

Without losing a moment he climbed headfirst into it, and found himself in complete darkness.

It was narrow and almost round, just as Robinson had described the tunnel through which he had made his escape from the perpendicular hole.

"I believe this is the identical place the old man was in, and that it leads straight to the mine gallery," breathed Paul, excitedly. "At any rate, I'm going to follow it up and see where I come out. I couldn't be in a worse scrape than at the bottom of the hole I've just left."

So the brave lad, buoyed up with renewed hope, crawled slowly along the narrow tunnel, feeling his way as he went.

After traversing what seemed to him in his unpleasant situation an endless distance, he suddenly became aware that the sides and roof had fallen away, and that there was now room to stand up.

He got on his feet, and found that he could not reach the rock above his head.

The sides of his new prison he could barely touch with both of his arms extended.

"Robinson said that he turned on a chance to his right," thought Paul. "I'll do the same. I'm almost certain now that I'm actually in the old deserted mine. If so I ought

to come out into the brush-covered opening in the same way he did. I'll see if the matches in my safe are dry. I should be glad to throw a light on the subject."

His matchsafe was a patent waterproof one, though he did not know it.

Opening it, he took out a match and struck it against a rock.

It flared up at once, and from the brief survey he was able to obtain of his surroundings he saw that he was in a long, fair-sized passage clearly made by the hand of man.

He no longer doubted where he was.

Surely this was one of the underground galleries of the Skull mountain mine.

CHAPTER XVI. THE FORTUNE WON.

Paul lit an occasional match as he made his way along the passage.

Finally he came to the cross tunnel, described by Job Robinson as the one which led direct to the opening of the mine.

The boy was now in exuberant spirits.

"I'll be out of this in no time at all," he said to himself jubilantly. "It seems to me that Gonzalez made the mistake of his life when he had me thrown into that hole. Still, if the end of the rope hadn't providentially caught in that rock my fate would have been sealed, anyway. It is evident that God did not intend I should die, but live to frustrate that scoundrel and bring retribution down on his head."

But now a very serious problem occurred to the boy's mind.

"That Mexican is probably already trying to locate the entrance to this place, and as he has the paper to direct his movements he ought to be able to do it without much trouble. I must look out that they do not come upon me before I can get outside. That would be hard luck indeed!"

Paul saw there wasn't a nook or corner where he could conceal himself if the rascals did come upon him suddenly with the torches they would of course provide themselves with to light their way underground.

"I've got to chance it," he said to himself. "I wonder how much further I've got to go?"

He struck one of his last matches and saw a thick growth of brush straight ahead.

It was so dense that not a glimmer of the light of day penetrated through it.

"I guess this is the outlet; but how the dickens I am to force my way through all that stuff is a puzzler. However, I s'pose it's got to be done. It must have grown a good bit since poor Robinson was here five years ago."

As a matter of fact, it was owing to this dense covering that the opening into the mine had never been discovered.

The brush was extraordinarily dense, and extended like a wall for a great many yards.

No one not obliged to pass through it would have thought of making the attempt.

"Gonzalez will have the job of his life trying to get in here," thought Paul, as he bored his way through the brush. "This is the worst thing I've ever tackled in my life."

But he never thought of getting discouraged, for was not he on his road to freedom and the outer air?

At last glimmerings of daylight came to him through the brush.

"I'm getting there by degrees," he murmured. "I guess Andy is wondering by this time where I have gone to. I'll have quite a story to tell him and Mr. Quill when I get back to the camp."

The light grew brighter as he advanced.

Flashes of sunshine glistened here and there.

Then, too, the brush was less dense as he got further and further from the mouth of the tunnel.

Finally he reached the end of the obstruction, and thrust his head outside into the open air.

The air was hot and close, for it was well along in the morning, and the sun quite high in the sky, but for all that Paul drew the atmosphere into his lungs with a sensation of delight.

He was practically free at last.

After a few moments he recovered his usual composure, and began to look for signs of Manuel Gonzalez and his villainous gang.

Not a human being was to be seen anywhere around.

"Where can they be?" he asked himself. "Surely if they were hunting for the mine they ought to be right in this neighborhood."

The rascals were in that neighborhood, but Paul could not see them.

"Well, I can't stay here all day. I'm going to make a break for the camp at all hazards."

He forced his way out of the brush, and then turned and looked at it.

"I don't wonder nobody could find the mouth of the mine, for there seems to be a mile of this brush, every bit of it exactly alike. It would be as easy to find a needle in a haystack as to find the mine, unless you knew exactly where it is. It's a great sight easier to enter it through that hole I was pitched into. All this stuff will have to be cleared away before anything can be done with the mine, and it will be no fool of a job, I can tell you."

Paul wondered how Job Robinson had ever been able to mark the spot, and at night, too, with the expectation of finding it again.

"It is hard enough making your way out, but to make your way in and hit the exact spot where the entrance is, well, I doubt if it can be done with anything like immediate success. I shan't try it, at any rate. The side entrance, by the way of the perpendicular hole, is good enough for me. One can easily get down there with the help of a rope, though a long ladder would be better."

Paul therefore made no effort to mark the spot, or take

note of the surroundings, but started along the foothills toward the camp.

He kept a bright lookout for Gonzalez and his crowd, and for a while saw nothing of them; neither did any one of them observe the boy, on account of the thick brush which concealed him from their eyes.

When Paul began to leave the brush behind and come out into the unsheltered open space, the Mexican saw him.

He naturally supposed it was Andy Blake who was hunting for his companion, and was not disposed to bother his head about him.

One of his gang happened to be sharper-eyed, and besides, was nearer Paul's line of retreat.

He uttered a shout of amazement, and running up to the Mexican, told him that the boy they had cast into the hole had in some manner made his escape.

Gonzalez at first insisted that he was dreaming, but the ruffian swore he had recognized the lad's face.

So the Mexican, while not by any means convinced, concluded to stop the youth.

Paul saw Gonzalez and two of his gang coming after him, so he took to his heels, the Mexican firing after him.

He set a hot pace for his foes, and consequently the chase became a lively one.

One thing now began to give Paul considerable uneasiness—he was afraid that he would not be able to find the camp under such strenuous conditions.

The firing, however, attracted the attention of both Andy, who had just returned from an unsuccessful hunt after his chum, and Phineas Quill.

"There's somethin' doin' yonder," said Quill, limping to a spot where he could command a view of the situation. "I'll bet that's your pard in trouble."

The prospector drew his unfailing six-shooter, and prepared for action.

In another moment Paul came flying into sight, with the three men after him as hard as they could put, and firing as rapidly as possible.

"Hi, hi, Paul, this way!" cried Andy, springing on the big rock, and waving his hat at his chum.

Paul saw him and changed his course.

Gonzalez, now certain that the boy he had doomed to death had in some unaccountable manner made his escape, was determined to recapture him at all hazard.

Phineas Quill grimly waited for him to come within easy range.

Paul dashed through the bushes into the camp, and fell down thoroughly exhausted, just as Quill's revolver rang out on the still air.

The bullet found its way straight to Manuel Gonzalez's heart, and the ruffian threw up his arms with a sharp cry, and fell dead in his own tracks.

The other rascals stopped, dumfounded.

The prospector put a ball through the ear of one of them, and that was enough to send them back kiting the way they had come.

Paul had a wonderful story to tell of his morning's adventures.

"You had a pretty narrow escape, pard," said the prospector, "and you ought to be thankful that you're alive."

"I am," replied Paul.

Later on, with the aid of a rope, the three descended the perpendicular hole, and entered the Skull mountain mine through the narrow passage originally discovered by Job Robinson.

With torches, which Quill showed them how to make, they explored the mine just as Robinson did, and the prospector's knowledge and experience of ore bodies demonstrated that the mine was a regular bonanza.

Before they returned to Tucson, Phineas Quill staked off as many claims in the immediate vicinity of the mine as the law allowed the three to take up, and the same were duly registered, and then the prospector undertook to dispose of the mine just as it stood to a syndicate.

Eventually a number of capitalists took things in hand, formed the Skull Mountain Gold and Silver Mining Company of Arizona, and paid Paul Clifford and his associates \$600,000 in cash, and gave them 40,000 shares of stock of a par value of \$10 each.

Of course, Paul got half of the cash and half of the shares for himself, while the other half was divided between Andy and Phineas Quinn.

To-day the stock is worth \$25 a share, and is mighty hard to get at that figure.

The company to date has divided \$5,000,000 in dividends among its share-holders, some of which has been paid to Paul Clifford, while Andy and Mr. Quill have each received a quarter of a million.

As the prospect of getting as much more out of the mine is very bright, Paul may be considered one of the luckiest young men in America.

He is worth about \$2,000,000—the bulk of it in cash, the market value of his mining stock being half a million.

He is married, and resides in a very swell Chicago home on the lake.

Andy also lives in good style in the Windy City, while Phineas Quill has a more modest home in the East.

Once a year, at Christmas, they invariably meet together in Paul's big house, and at these joyous reunions they always have something to recall about the time when they were After a Fortune.

THE END.

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